

Université de Montréal

**Le développement des fonctions exécutives à l'âge préscolaire : Le  
rôle des comportements maternels en présence de différents  
facteurs de vulnérabilité**

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## Résumé

L'intérêt marqué et simultané de plusieurs champs de recherche pour le développement des fonctions exécutives (FE) a permis de mettre en lumière le rôle primordial de ces fonctions dans plusieurs sphères du développement de la petite enfance jusqu'à l'âge adulte. Les mécanismes développementaux associés aux différences individuelles restent par ailleurs encore peu étudiés. Les deux articles empiriques qui constituent la thèse visent à documenter le rôle des comportements maternels observés en bas âge dans la prédiction des FE mesurées à l'âge préscolaire. Les deux articles s'inscrivent dans la foulée des travaux qui, selon une approche écologique (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), considèrent les effets d'interaction entre différents facteurs explicatifs pour mieux comprendre les mécanismes impliqués dans le développement de l'enfant.

En ce sens, le premier article examine les interactions possibles entre le statut socioéconomique (SSE) de la famille et différentes dimensions du concept de sensibilité maternelle, dans la prédiction de deux dimensions des FE, soit les FE-conflit et les FE-inhibition. Dans le cadre de cette étude, 114 dyades mères-enfants ont participé à trois visites à domicile. Le SSE a été mesuré par questionnaire dans le cadre d'une première visite dans la famille lorsque les enfants avaient six mois, la sensibilité maternelle a été évaluée à 12 mois à partir du Tri de cartes de comportements maternels (Pederson & Moran, 1995) et les FE à 36 mois à partir d'une batterie de tâches choisie sur la base des orientations proposées par Carlson (2005). Le deuxième article explore, en se basant sur postulats de la Théorie de la susceptibilité différentielle (TSD), les possibles interactions entre différentes dimensions du concept de sensibilité maternelle et le tempérament de l'enfant, et ce également dans la prédiction des FE. Pour ce faire, 72 dyades ont également participé à trois visites à domicile.

La sensibilité maternelle a été évaluée à 12 mois à partir du Tri de cartes de comportements maternels (Pederson & Moran, 1995), le tempérament à 15 mois à l'aide d'un questionnaire rempli par la mère (ICQ; Bates, Freeland, & Lounsbury, 1979) et les FE à 36 mois à partir de la même batterie de tâche (Carlson, 2005).

Les résultats du premier article révèlent des interactions significatives entre le statut socioéconomique et certaines dimensions de comportements maternels, de telle sorte que des comportements maternels de meilleure qualité sont prédicteurs d'une meilleure performance aux tâches de FE, mais seulement chez les enfants provenant de familles relativement désavantagées sur le plan socioéconomique et essentiellement en ce qui concerne les FE-inhibition. Quant aux résultats du deuxième article, ils confirment les hypothèses de la Théorie de la susceptibilité différentielle, en révélant que les enfants ayant un tempérament difficile sont plus affectés par des comportements maternels hostiles, de même que par l'absence de comportements positifs et bénéficient davantage de la présence de comportements positifs et de l'absence de comportements négatifs, et ceci également au regard des FE-inhibition.

Mots clé : Fonctions exécutives, sensibilité maternelle, statut socioéconomique, tempérament, âge préscolaire, modération, facteur de vulnérabilité, susceptibilité différentielle.

## **Abstract**

The simultaneous and marked interest of many fields of research for the notion of executive functioning (EF) has allowed for the primordial role of these functions in many spheres of development to be identified. However, the developmental mechanisms associated with individual differences in EF are still under studied. The two empirical articles constituting this dissertation aim at documenting the role of maternal behaviors in the prediction of EF in the preschool period. Using an ecological approach (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), interaction effects between different explanatory factors are considered, with the goal of reaching a better understanding of the mechanisms underlying early EF development.

To do so, the first article examines the interactions between family socioeconomic status (SES) and different dimensions of maternal behavior in the prediction of two specific components of EF, namely, conflict-EF and impulse control. 114 mother-child dyads participated in three home visits. SES was measured by a questionnaire filled by mothers during the first visit when their child was six months old and maternal behavior was observed in a second visit when the child was 12 months old, using the Maternal Behavior Q-Sort (MBQS; Pederson & Moran, 1995). Finally, child EF was assessed at 3 years with a battery of tasks chosen based on Carlson's (2005) measurement guidelines.

The second article explores, based on Differential Susceptibility Theory (DST), the interactions between different dimensions of maternal behavior and child temperament in the prediction of child EF. Seventy-two mother-child dyads participated in three home visits. Maternal sensitivity was observed when children were 12 months old, using the MBQS, child temperament was assessed at 15 months using a maternal report (ICQ; Bates, Freeland, &

Lounsbury, 1979), and child EF was assessed with the same battery of tasks as in the first article.

The results of the first article showed significant interactions between family SES and the quality of maternal behaviors in the prediction EF, such that maternal behavior was related to EF only for children in the lower end of the SES spectrum and those relations were found especially for impulse control. The results of the second article confirmed the hypothesis put forward by DST, revealing that children with difficult temperaments were more affected by hostile maternal behavior and the absence of positive behavior, and that these same children benefit more than their easier peers from the presence of positive behaviors, but only in the prediction of impulse control.

Keywords: Executive functions, maternal sensitivity, socioeconomic status, temperament, preschool period, moderation, vulnerability, differential susceptibility.

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## Liste des sigles et des abréviations

DCCS	Dimensional Change Card Sort
DST	Differential susceptibility theory
EF	Executive functioning
FE	Fonctions exécutives
MBQS	Maternal Behavior Q-Sort
TSD	Théorie de la susceptibilité différentielle

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## **Introduction**

Dès leur plus jeune âge, les enfants doivent apprendre à détecter les changements dans leur environnement, en comprendre les règles et s'y adapter. Les multiples interactions avec l'environnement auxquelles les enfants font face peuvent susciter différentes réactions, positives ou négatives, qui favorisent ou interfèrent avec leur développement. Selon la théorie de l'attachement (Bowlby, 1982), la relation créée dans le cadre des interactions entre l'enfant et son principal donneur de soins est déterminante pour procurer à l'enfant une sécurité émotionnelle essentielle à un sain développement, et ce, tant au plan social, émotionnel, que cognitif. En ce sens, la thèse, par deux articles de nature empirique et un devis longitudinal, vise à approfondir la nature du rôle des comportements maternels dans le développement des différentes habiletés nécessaires pour mieux saisir le monde qui nous entoure, qui correspondent essentiellement à des fonctions cognitives inter reliées, regroupées sous le terme de fonctions exécutives (FE) (Hughes, 2009).

## **Les fonctions exécutives**

**Définition.** Le domaine de la neuropsychologie développementale a porté un intérêt particulier à l'ontogenèse des (FE), un construit qui fut originalement proposé pour rendre compte de divers processus cognitifs déficients suite à un dommage au cortex frontal chez les adultes (Stuss & Benson, 1986). Il a depuis été démontré que les FE se développent au cours de l'enfance et qu'il est possible de mesurer de manière fiable les rudiments de ces habiletés dès l'âge préscolaire (Carlson, 2005; Carlson, Moses, & Claxton, 2004). La définition des FE varie légèrement d'un auteur à l'autre, mais tous considèrent celles-ci comme sous-jacentes au contrôle volontaire de la pensée et de l'action. Les processus cognitifs centraux des FE semblent faire consensus: la mémoire de travail, la flexibilité cognitive, la planification et

l'inhibition volontaire (Hughes, 2002; Miyake, Friedman, Emerson, Witzki, & Howerter, 2000; Welsh, Pennington, & Groisser, 1991; Zelazo, Reznick, Carter, & Frye, 1997). Les données empiriques suggèrent fortement que le construit des FE est multidimensionnel et varie en terme de trajectoires développementales, c'est-à-dire que ses composantes n'atteignent pas leur maturité au même rythme et sont influencées par des facteurs différents (Anderson, Jacob, & Anderson, 2008).

La mémoire à court terme ou mémoire de travail est définie par l'habileté des individus à maintenir et manipuler l'information nécessaire pour traiter les demandes perçues dans l'environnement (Baddeley, 1986; Daneman & Merikle, 1996). La mémoire à court terme serait essentielle et précurseur au développement des autres FE, étant donné son rôle dans l'exécution de comportements intentionnels nécessitant une planification (Zelazo et al. 1997; Zelazo, Carlson, & Kesek, 2008). La flexibilité cognitive réfère à la capacité de s'adapter aux changements de règles dans l'environnement, et ce, dans le but d'atteindre un objectif spécifique (Lewis & Carpendale, 2009; Zelazo et al., 2008). Ce processus cognitif influencerait la gestion des émotions, des pensées et de la mémoire (Rueda, Posner, & Rothbart, 2005). Quant à la planification, elle correspond à la capacité de planifier une séquence d'évènements dans le temps afin d'atteindre un objectif. Finalement, l'inhibition volontaire se définit par la capacité de supprimer ou retenir une pensée et une action qui pourrait nuire, directement ou indirectement, à l'atteinte d'un but précis (Rothbart & Posner, 1985).

Anatomiquement, les FE sont associées au cortex cingulaire préfrontal et antérieur (Casey et al., 1995; Durston et al., 2002). Ces aires cérébrales sont non seulement associées aux FE, mais montrent aussi des connexions avec le système limbique et d'autres structures du

tronc cérébral, impliquées dans la réactivité émotionnelle et la réponse au stress (Bush, Luu, & Posner, 2000; Drevets & Raichle, 1998; LeDoux, 1996). Ces aires cérébrales sont constituées de divisions qui gèrent de l'information émotionnelle autant que cognitive (Blair, Zelazo, & Grennberg, 2005).

Au regard de ces constats, Zelazo et Cunningham (2007) ont proposé un modèle neuronal qui place deux dimensions de FE aux extrémités d'un continuum. D'un côté, les FE qui sont mesurées par des tâches qui n'impliquent pas de réponse émotionnelle (ex : tâches évaluant la mémoire à court terme et la flexibilité cognitive), appelées *cool FE* ou FE-conflit et de l'autre côté du continuum, les FE mesurées par des tâches qui sollicitent les systèmes émotionnels et motivationnels, appelées *hot FE* ou FE-inhibition (ex : tâches qui sollicitent davantage l'inhibition volontaire). Les prémisses de ce modèle sont appuyées par des études utilisant des techniques d'imagerie cérébrale qui montrent que l'activation de différentes FE est associée à une activité cérébrale dans différentes aires du cortex préfrontal (Hongwanishkul, Happaney, Lee, & Zelazo, 2005). Au niveau comportemental, ce modèle est également supporté par l'étude de Zelazo et Müller (2002) qui a confirmé que des dommages au cortex dorsolatéral préfrontal sont associés à des déficits au niveau des FE observées dans des contextes de résolution de problèmes à charge non affective, tandis que des dommages au cortex orbitofrontal, ayant des connexions avec le système limbique, sont associés à des déficits au niveau socioémotionnel. La distinction entre ces deux dimensions des FE est aussi confirmée statistiquement. Effectivement, des analyses factorielles menées de façon indépendante auprès de différents échantillons indiquent que les tâches évaluant les FE-conflit ne se regroupent pas sous le même facteur que les tâches qui sollicitent les FE-inhibition

(Bernier, Carlson, & Whipple, 2010; Carlson, Mandell, & Williams, 2004; Carlson & Moses, 2001; Conway & Stifter, 2012).

### **Développement des fonctions exécutives à l'âge préscolaire et corrélats développementaux.**

La période préscolaire est une période où l'enfant se développe rapidement à plusieurs niveaux. Entre l'âge de deux et cinq ans, il est possible de constater une augmentation importante des connexions neuronales du cortex préfrontal (Huttenlocher, 2002). Cette période semble être une fenêtre développementale critique dans laquelle des perturbations pourraient avoir comme conséquences des dommages résiduels permanents (Anderson et al., 2008). Au plan comportemental, ceci coïncide avec des améliorations notables de la mémoire à court terme, de l'inhibition volontaire, des habiletés de planification, ainsi que l'apparition de comportements sociaux qui sont en lien avec ces FE (Carlson, 2003). Durant cette même période, les comportements de persévération, définis par la tendance des enfants à répéter un comportement, même si celui-ci n'est plus approprié pour atteindre un but (Morton & Mukanata, 2002), diminuent significativement.

Par exemple, dans une tâche développée par Hughes (1998), les enfants doivent trouver des collants cachés dans différentes boîtes. Chez les enfants de deux ans, plusieurs regardent toujours dans les mêmes boîtes même si celles-ci étaient vides dans l'essai précédent. Par contre, à trois ans, les enfants sont en mesure de tenir plus d'information en mémoire à court terme et les comportements de persévération disparaissent (Carlson, 2003). Concernant la flexibilité cognitive, les études qui utilisent le Dimensional Change Card Sort task, mesure validée et largement utilisée dans les études du développement des FE (DCCS; voir Carlson, 2005; Frye, Zelazo, & Palfai, 1995; Hughes, 1998; Zelazo, Frye, & Rapus, 1996; Zelazo et al.,



2003), révèlent que la période critique de développement de cette habileté est également entre deux et quatre ans. Dans le cadre de cette tâche, il est demandé aux enfants de classer une série de cartes selon leur couleur ou leur forme. Les enfants âgés de deux ans et moins ont de la difficulté à modifier le classement des cartes lorsque la règle change et présentent presque systématiquement des comportements de persévération (Zelazo et al., 2008). Peu de temps plus tard, une amélioration de la performance est observée à trois ans et la plupart des enfants de quatre ans effectuent le changement de règles aisément (Carlson & Moses, 2001; Kirkham, Cruess, & Diamond, 2003; Munakata & Yerys, 2001; Perner, Stummer, & Lang, 1999; Zelazo et al., 1996).

Au niveau de la planification, dès l'âge de deux ans les enfants commencent à parler d'évènements futurs (Hudson, Shapiro, & Sosa, 1995), mais les études indiquent que la capacité des enfants à planifier une séquence d'évènements telle que se lever, s'habiller, aller à l'école et aller au lit, se développe vers l'âge de quatre ans seulement (Friedman, 1990). Les études suggèrent qu'au niveau de la planification, les comportements de recherche de l'enfant deviennent moins redondants, plus exhaustifs et généralement plus systématiques entre l'âge de trois et cinq ans (Zelazo et al., 1997). Toutefois, ces habiletés semblent plus difficiles à évaluer de manière valide chez les enfants de moins de cinq ans (Anderson et al., 2008). Pour cette raison, cette composante des FE n'est pas prise en compte dans le cadre des deux articles qui constituent cette thèse.

Les capacités d'inhibition volontaire suivent une courbe développementale semblable (Anderson et al., 2008; Zelazo et al., 2008). Par exemple, la capacité des enfants à attendre plus longtemps pour une plus grosse récompense s'améliore significativement entre trois et quatre ans (Carlson, Davis, & Leach, 2005). Plus précisément, les enfants de trois ans tendent

à choisir une plus grosse récompense plus tard au lieu d'une plus petite sans délai, lorsqu'il leur est demandé de choisir pour quelqu'un d'autre, mais lorsque les récompenses sont pour eux, ils choisissent souvent la plus petite. Quant à Carlson et ses collègues (2005), dans une autre version de tâche qui sollicite les FE-inhibition où les enfants doivent pointer une récompense plus petite (ex : deux bonbons) afin d'obtenir une plus grande récompense (ex : cinq bonbons), les enfants de trois ans performant significativement moins bien que leurs pairs de quatre ans.

Les FE seraient impliquées de plusieurs manières dans l'autorégulation en général, qui inclut l'activation physiologique, le contrôle de la motricité, la régulation émotionnelle, les comportements prosociaux, l'attention, la résolution de problème et le contrôle des systèmes cérébraux (Bronson, 2002). En lien avec cette proposition, plusieurs chercheurs postulent que la réussite scolaire est largement déterminée par la capacité des enfants à s'autoréguler et inhiber des comportements inappropriés à une situation donnée (Blair, 2002; Zimmerman & Schunk, 1989). D'autres études révèlent que les FE sont directement en lien avec les habiletés de communication, de socialisation et de lecture (Clark, Prior, & Kinsella, 2002), à la performance académique en général (Biederman et al., 2004; Hughes, Ensor, Wilson, & Graham, 2010; Kinsella et al., 1997) ainsi qu'aux compétences morales et sociales (Hughes & Ensor, 2010; Kochanska, Barry, Jimenez, Hollatz, & Woodard, J., 2009). Plus récemment, des études ont montré une relation robuste entre les FE et les habiletés en lien avec la théorie de l'esprit, soit la capacité de se mettre à la place de l'autre, et ce, indépendamment de l'âge et du quotient intellectuel (Carlson & Moses, 2001; Carlson, Moses, & Breton, 2002; Frye et al, 1995; Hughes, 1998a, 1998b; Perner & Lang, 2000; Perner, Lang, & Kloo, 2002).

En cohérence avec les différentes connexions anatomiques observées, les FE-Conflit et les FE-Inhibition seraient associées différemment à des aspects distincts du développement. Par exemple, les résultats de l'étude de Hongwanishkul et al. (2005) suggèrent une relation entre le fonctionnement cognitif général et les FE-Conflit, mais une absence de relation avec les FE-Inhibition. Ce résultat est cohérent avec l'idée que les FE-Inhibition, de par leur nature émotionnelle énoncée précédemment, seraient davantage en lien avec l'intelligence sociale et émotionnelle. De plus, une recension des écrits de Moses, Carlson et Sabbagh (2005) rapporte des associations différentes entre les deux dimensions de FE et la théorie de l'esprit.

D'autre part, des déficits au niveau des FE, plus particulièrement des FE-inhibition, sont communs à plusieurs problèmes psychologiques dans l'enfance tels que les problèmes de comportements extériorisés (Séguin, 2004), le trouble d'attention avec hyperactivités (TDAH) (Clark et al., 2002; Eslinger et al., 2004), et les troubles associés au spectre de l'autisme (Pennington & Ozonoff, 1996).

Le rôle crucial que semblent jouer les FE dans les sphères cognitive et émotionnelle de développement a mis en lumière l'importance et la pertinence de s'attarder aux facteurs susceptibles d'expliquer les mécanismes à l'origine des différences individuelles. À cet égard, l'hypothèse classique selon laquelle il y aurait d'importants liens entre le développement du cerveau et les expériences environnementales précoces (Greenough, Black, & Wallace, 1987) ne cesse de gagner en popularité dans la communauté scientifique (Belsky & De Haan, 2011; Fox & Rutter, 2010). L'intérêt grandissant pour ce type d'hypothèse est le résultat du récent croisement de champs de recherche qui évoluaient traditionnellement de manière parallèle (Stiles, 2009), soit les domaines de la neuroscience et du développement social. Ce croisement

permet des avenues de recherche prometteuses dans l'exploration des mécanismes associés au développement cognitif, dont le développement des FE.

### **Le rôle des expériences relationnelles précoces dans le développement des fonctions exécutives**

Plusieurs chercheurs, provenant de traditions de recherche différentes, ont avancé l'hypothèse selon laquelle les expériences relationnelles précoces ont un impact direct et significatif sur le développement du cerveau de l'enfant (Belsky & De Haan, 2011; De Bellis, 2001; Glaser, 2000; Nelson & Bloom, 1997). À ce sujet, il est démontré que la densité neuronale des lobes frontaux commence à décliner vers l'âge de sept ans seulement, ce qui laisse une période relativement longue de plasticité cérébrale, où l'environnement peut avoir une influence significative (Huttenlocher, 2002). Des études utilisant des modèles animaux révèlent qu'une activation chronique du système responsable de la régulation du stress affecte significativement le développement structurel du cerveau (Francis, Caldji, Champagne, Plotsky, & Meaney, 1999) et certains aspects de la cognition. Or, il est bien démontré que la qualité des relations parent-enfant exerce une puissante influence sur les processus de régulation du stress chez l'enfant (Gunnar, Brodersen, Nachmias, Buss, & Rigatuso, 1996; Gunnar & Donzella, 2002). Des études menées dans des contextes de soins humains hautement inadéquats, marqués par la négligence ou l'abus (DeBellis, 2001; 2005) ou encore par la privation émotive, sensorielle et relationnelle extrême (Marshall & Fox, 2004; Rutter, 2000), démontrent l'influence négative d'un environnement hostile sur le développement du cerveau des jeunes enfants. À l'inverse, par des réponses promptes, constantes et chaleureuses, le parent contribue à soutenir la régulation de l'enfant. Au regard de ces constats, le concept de la sensibilité maternelle, défini par des réponses promptes, appropriées, constantes et

chaleureuses aux signaux de l'enfant (Ainsworth, Bell, & Stayton, 1974), a été choisi comme mesure des comportements maternels pour les deux articles de la thèse.

L'instrument de référence pour évaluer la sensibilité maternelle par observation est le Tri de cartes de comportements maternels (Pederson & Moran, 1995). Cet instrument est constitué de 90 items qui décrivent des comportements maternels (pour une description détaillée, voir la section Method des deux articles). La majorité des études qui se servent de cet instrument prennent en compte seulement le score global de sensibilité, ce qui donnerait lieu, selon les auteurs, à une perte de richesse et de précision de l'information. C'est dans cette optique qu'une approche multidimensionnelle des comportements maternels a été privilégiée dans les deux articles.

Considérant les liens de mieux en mieux documentés entre les facteurs environnementaux et le développement cérébral (Chugani et al., 2001; Marshall & Fox, 2004), ainsi que le développement rapide des lobes frontaux durant l'enfance (Duncan, 2001; Paus et al., 1999), plusieurs auteurs sont d'avis que l'étude des influences familiales et relationnelles est une avenue prometteuse pour identifier et mieux comprendre l'origine des différences individuelles des FE (Carlson, 2003; Fonagy & Target, 2002; Glaser, 2000). À cet égard, des études ont observé que les enfants dont les mères utilisent des comportements qui supportent ceux-ci en situation de résolution de problèmes (soutien à l'autonomie) montrent de meilleures performances aux tâches de FE et ce, de manière concomitante (Bibok, Carpendale, & Müller, 2009) et longitudinale (Bernier et al., 2010; Conway & Stifter, 2012; Hammond, Müller, Carpendale, Bibok, & Liebermann-Finestone, 2012; Hughes & Ensor, 2009). Un autre constat intéressant, commun à plusieurs de ces études, est que les liens entre comportements maternels et les FE semblent différer selon la dimension de FE considérée (FE-conflit et FE-inhibition)

(Bernier et al., 2010; 2012; Conway & Stifter, 2012). Étant donné ces résultats, les deux dimensions de FE seront traitées séparément dans les deux articles de la thèse.

## **Objectifs de la thèse**

**Au-delà des effets principaux.** La thèse vise à contribuer à l'avancement des connaissances en proposant un devis longitudinal qui, possiblement, permettra de mieux comprendre le rôle des comportements maternels dans le développement des FE à l'âge préscolaire. Les études en psychologie du développement ont traditionnellement mis l'accent sur les effets principaux des comportements parentaux, assumant ainsi que les enfants sont tous influencés de la même manière et au même degré par ceux-ci (Belsky, Bakermans-Kranenburg, & Van IJzendoorn, 2007). Aussi pertinents puissent être ces résultats, les études qui considèrent les effets principaux ne prennent pas souvent en compte les effets d'interactions. Les effets de modulation révèlent et précisent comment les effets bénéfiques ou néfastes des comportements parentaux peuvent varier en magnitude, voire en direction, selon des caractéristiques environnementales ou propres à l'enfant (Belsky et al., 2007; Bronfenbrenner, 1993). L'idée selon laquelle des comportements maternels sensibles agiraient comme un facteur de protection de même que des comportements hostiles, de rejet et peu sensibles comme un facteur aggravant en présence d'éléments de vulnérabilité est centrale à la thèse, et a inspiré les deux articles qui la constituent.

D'ailleurs, plusieurs programmes d'intervention spécialement conçus pour des familles très à risque sur le plan du statut socioéconomique (SSE) (Dozier et al., 2006; Moss et al., 2011) sont basés sur la prémisse que la qualité des relations parent-enfant est le mécanisme clé afin de briser la transmission intergénérationnelle du cycle de la pauvreté qui caractérise trop souvent les familles désavantagées sur le plan socioéconomique. Ce genre de programme vise

donc à favoriser l'effet protecteur des comportements parentaux en présence de risque environnemental. D'autres types de programme visent davantage les enfants à risque sur le plan biologique, qui se manifeste par un tempérament difficile au niveau comportemental (Ellis, Boyce, Belsky, Bakermans-Kranenburg, & Van IJzendoorn, 2011), dans lesquels l'objectif est toujours de favoriser l'effet protecteur des comportements parentaux, mais cette fois en présence d'un risque associé à des caractéristiques propres à l'enfant (Klein, Velderman, Bakermans-Kranenburg, Juffer, & Van IJzendoorn, 2006). Tel que souligné par plusieurs auteurs, le développement de programmes d'intervention efficaces débute par l'identification des processus précis qui sous-tendent le développement des diverses facettes du développement de l'enfant. En optant pour une approche multidimensionnelle des comportements maternels et des FE et en tenant compte d'éventuels effets d'interaction, il est possible d'émettre l'hypothèse que les deux articles de la thèse pourront contribuer à préciser et mieux cibler les interventions préventives qui visent le développement cognitif précoce, en lien avec la vulnérabilité environnementale ou biologique. Dans cette optique et à la lumière de la littérature existante, chaque article tient compte d'un facteur vulnérabilité susceptible d'interagir avec différents domaines de sensibilité maternelle, soit le statut socioéconomique (article 1) et un tempérament difficile chez l'enfant (article 2) dans la prédiction des FE.

Le premier article a trois objectifs principaux : 1) confirmer la relation entre le niveau socioéconomique familial et le développement des deux dimensions de FE chez des enfants d'âge préscolaire, 2) explorer les liens prospectifs entre les comportements maternels observés à 1 an et les FE de l'enfant mesurées à 3 ans et 3) tester les possibles interactions entre le SSE et les comportements maternels au regard du développement des FE. Puis, sur la base des postulats de la Théorie de la susceptibilité différentielle (TSD), le deuxième article investigue

comment le tempérament de l'enfant modère la relation entre les comportements maternels et le développement des deux dimensions de FE.

La collecte de données associée au projet longitudinal dans lequel s'inscrit cette thèse s'est poursuivie pendant toute la durée de la rédaction de celle-ci. À des fins de publication, le premier article a été révisé et étant donné la disponibilité de nouvelles données, l'échantillon initial a presque été doublé. Ceci explique le plus grand nombre de participants dans l'article 1, comparativement à l'article 2.



## Article 1

The role of proximal and distal family influences in the development of child executive functioning: A longitudinal study

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The role of proximal and distal family influences in the development of child executive  
functioning: A longitudinal study

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## Abstract

Family socioeconomic status (SES) and the quality of maternal behavior are among the few identified predictors of child executive functioning (EF), and they have often been found to have interactive rather than additive effects on other domains of child functioning. The purpose of this study was to explore their interactive effects in the prediction of child EF. We assessed maternal behavior at 1 year and two dimensions of child EF (Conflict-EF and Impulse Control) at 3 years with 114 mother-child dyads. The analyses revealed that better child performance on both Conflict-EF and Impulse Control was significantly related to higher family SES, while only Conflict-EF was associated with maternal behavior. Furthermore, significant interactions were found when predicting Conflict-EF and Impulse Control, such that higher quality maternal behavior was predictive of better performance only among children from lower-SES families. These results are consistent with the idea that more vulnerable children may benefit from high quality parenting to a greater degree.

Keywords : Parenting, socioeconomic status, executive functions, preschool children, moderation

## The role of proximal and distal family influences in the development of child executive functioning: A longitudinal study

The preschool period is marked by quick and important changes in the control of thought and action (Zelazo & Jacques, 1996). Theory and empirical research strongly suggest that these changes can be explained, in part, by the development of executive functioning (EF). EF refers to the set of higher-order cognitive processes that underlie flexible goal-directed behavior, such as working memory, set-shifting, inhibitory control, and planning (Garon, Bryson, & Smith, 2008). Several studies have demonstrated that child performance on EF tasks clusters in factors (e.g., Garon et al., 2008), with a two-factor structure often reported among toddlers and preschoolers (see Beck, Schaefer, Pang, & Carlson, 2011): “Impulse Control”, that is, the ability to delay or suppress an impulsive response, and “Conflict-EF”, the ability to respond appropriately in the face of a salient conflicting response option. As noted by Zelazo, Carlson, and Kesek (2008), the literature on child EF has exploded in the last decade. A great deal has thus been learned, for instance regarding the brain structures implicated in EF (Anderson, Jacobs, & Anderson, 2008), age-related changes in early EF (Zelazo et al., 2008), the measurement of EF in the preschool period (Carlson, 2005), and correlates of child EF (e.g., Blair & Razza, 2007). In contrast, as highlighted by Hughes and Ensor (2005; 2009), studies on how the social environment impacts on the development of child EF are still relatively rare.

One of the few identified antecedents of individual differences in child EF is family socio-economic status (SES): children from higher-SES families consistently perform better on EF tasks (e.g., Ardila, Rosselli, Matute, & Guajardo, 2005; Hughes & Ensor, 2009; Mezzacappa, 2004; Noble, Norman, & Farah, 2005). Studies finding similar links between

family SES and other aspects of child cognition (see Bradley & Corwyn, 2002) have raised the question of how such a distal concept as SES may influence child performance on specific cognitive tasks. It is thus advocated that research identifies proximal factors more likely to “reach” the child (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; McLoyd, 1998). Recently, quality of parenting has begun to be identified as a proximal antecedent of child EF (Bernier, Carlson, & Whipple, 2010; Bibok, Carpendale, & Müller, 2009; Blair et al., 2011; Hughes & Ensor, 2009). Importantly, high-quality parenting has also long been known to act as a buffer against the negative influence of socio-economic disadvantage on different aspects of child functioning (e.g., Garmezy, 1993; Masten, 1994). The relations of SES and parenting to child EF are, therefore, likely to be non-independent, but this has yet to be investigated. Accordingly, the primary goal of this report is to examine whether parenting quality interacts with family SES in predicting child EF, such that high quality parenting would protect children against the negative impact of socio-economic disadvantage.

### **Family SES and child EF**

The idea that family SES has a crucial influence on child development is not new. The mechanisms through which it can affect child development are illustrated by the idea of capital (Coleman, 1988; McLoyd & Ceballo, 1998). It is proposed that the more access families have to different types of capital (financial capital such as income, human capital such as education), the better equipped they are to provide a rich environment, favorable to optimal child development (Hoff-Ginsberg & Tardif, 1995; Shonkoff & Philips, 2000; Yeung, Linver, & Brooks-Gunn, 2002). In contrast, there is concern that many children growing up in lower-SES families have more limited access to these same material and human resources, which may place them at risk for developmental problems (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997).

Consistent with these theoretical claims, a long tradition of empirical research with vulnerable families confirms that lower family SES (e.g., economic disadvantage and/or lower levels of parental education) is associated with developmental risk in health, cognitive and socioemotional domains, which can begin as early as pregnancy and continue into adulthood (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Conger & Donellan, 2007; Duncan, Ziol-Guest, & Kalil, 2010). Infants living in disadvantaged families are more likely to experience early growth retardation and inadequate neurobehavioral development (DiPietro, Costigan, Hilton, & Pressman, 1999) as well as later sleep problems (El-Sheikh et al., 2013). Numerous studies have also observed robust correlations between family SES and child cognitive development. For instance, children from higher-SES families perform significantly better on verbal and non-verbal tasks and show higher school achievement and IQ throughout childhood (e.g., Duncan, Brooks-Gunn, & Klebanov, 1994; Escalona, 1982; NICHD ECCRN, 2005). Child EF has also often been observed to correlate with family SES, whether in primarily middle-class (Bernier et al., 2010; Carlson, Mandell, & Williams, 2004), predominantly low-income (Blair et al., 2011) or socio-economically diverse samples (Hughes, Ensor, Wilson, & Graham, 2010; Mezzacappa, 2004; Noble et al., 2005; Wiebe et al., 2011), at different ages (Ardila et al., 2005; Sarsour et al., 2011).

The link between family SES and child EF thus appears to be robust, and is consistent with a large body of theorizing and research on the effects of SES on child cognitive functioning. It does not, however, open avenues for intervention with vulnerable children, given that SES is not easily amenable to change. According to an ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), proximal factors, such as parent-child interactions, are at least as influential in shaping developmental outcomes. Among the very few more proximal and more

malleable factors that have been shown to predict child EF is the quality of parent-child interactions.

### **Parenting and child EF**

Indirect support for a presumed role of parent-child relationships in child EF development stems from studies that have found parenting to relate to constructs bearing similarities to some components of EF, labelled for instance as metacognition (Moss, Parent, Gosselin, & Dumont, 1993), self-regulation (e.g., Jennings et al., 2008), planning, attention, and memory (Gauvain, 2001; NICHD ECCRN, 2005), behavioral regulation (Clark, Woodward, Horwood, & Moor, 2008), or effortful control (e.g., Eisenberg et al., 2010; Kochanska, Murray, & Harlan, 2000; Poehlmann et al., 2010).

When considering EF per se however, the evidence is more limited, although growing. Thus far, studies have mainly focused on scaffolding, which refers to the ways parents teach their children how to solve a problem and find a solution that they could not reach on their own (Hughes & Ensor, 2009). Studies found that better parental scaffolding was related to higher child performance on EF tasks, either concurrently (Bibok et al., 2009) or longitudinally (Hammond, Müller, Carpendale, Bibok, & Liebermann-Finestone, 2012; Hughes & Ensor, 2009). Bernier et al. (2010) found such relations as well, but also observed two other maternal behaviors, namely sensitivity and mind-mindedness, to relate to child subsequent EF performance. These last results suggest, as proposed by Hughes and Ensor (2009), that different types of parental behavior may contribute to child EF development. In fact, research increasingly suggests that different dimensions of caregiving can have distinct contributions to child functioning (e.g., Meins, Fernyhough, Fradley, & Tuckey, 2001; Moran, Forbes, Evans, Tarabulsky, & Madigan, 2008) and indeed, Blair et al. (2011) recently reported

that both positive and negative aspects of parenting were related to child EF. Accordingly, the current report adopts a multidimensional approach to maternal behavior in order to pursue the investigation of the prospective links between parenting and child EF. We thus examine the links between dimensions of maternal behavior at age 1 and child EF performance at age 3.

Dimensions of maternal behavior will be assessed using the Maternal Behavior Q-Sort (MBQS; Pederson & Moran, 1995), which has traditionally been used to derive one score of overall maternal sensitivity. However, the authors of the instrument argue that the sole use of this global score may result in significant loss in data precision, and have developed seven theoretically-derived domains of maternal behavior that can be extracted from the MBQS (please see Method section for a full description). In addition to this increased level of precision, the MBQS was deemed well-suited to investigate the current research questions given its particularly well-documented psychometric properties (e.g., Atkinson et al., 1999; Pederson et al., 1990; Pederson, Gleason, Moran, & Bento, 1998; Pederson & Moran, 1995; Tarabulsky et al., 2009), along with its impressive predictive capacity with respect to many aspects of young children's functioning, such as attachment security (Van IJzendoorn, Vereijken, Bakermans-Kranenburg, & Riksen-Walraven, 2004), emotional and behavioral adjustment (Bordeleau, Bernier, & Carrier, 2012), cognitive development (Lemelin, Tarabulsky, & Provost, 2006; Moran, Pederson, Pettit, & Krupka, 1992), and executive functioning (Bernier et al., 2010). Accordingly, the present study will use the domains of the MBQS to assess the quality of maternal behavior.

As mentioned above, there is indication that high quality parenting, in addition to being a central predictor of many aspects of child development, may also protect the child against socio-economic disadvantage. We turn to this issue in the next section.



## **From direct links to moderation models**

The current paper's hypothesis that parenting may buffer the adversity associated with social disadvantage in relation to child EF is partly inspired by Belsky's (1997) proposition that parenting may be of special importance for more vulnerable children. This notion, referred to as *differential susceptibility*, implies that some children's inner characteristics (e.g., difficult temperament, genetic vulnerability) interact with parental behaviors in predicting developmental outcomes. As summarized by Belsky, Bakermans-Kranenburg and Van IJzendoorn (2007), studies tend to suggest that more vulnerable children are more susceptible to caregiving influences, and hence that high quality parenting can protect children against biological adversity (e.g., Barry, Kochanska, & Philibert, 2008).

It is thus growingly believed that parenting interacts with *child* characteristics in impacting child outcomes. But is it also the case that parenting interacts in a similar manner with *environmental* characteristics, such that more environmentally vulnerable children, for instance those from lower-SES backgrounds, would be more susceptible to parenting? Although the question has not yet been investigated with respect to child cognitive or EF development, research on child behavioral development provides evidence suggesting that such an interaction effect between parenting and family SES may be at play. Indeed, research suggests that higher quality parenting is associated with lower levels of children's externalizing behavior problems, particularly among children from lower-SES backgrounds (Beyers, Bates, Pettit, & Dodge, 2003; Schonberg & Shaw, 2007; Supplee, Unikel, & Shaw, 2007).

Less is known about interaction effects between parenting and family SES with respect to child cognitive development, although such interactive effects have been postulated

(Conger & Donellan, 2007). Indirect evidence comes from the daycare literature, which suggests that high quality daycare is especially beneficial for children living in social disadvantage. Hence, Geoffroy et al. (2007) found that high quality daycare was beneficial for children's language skills, but only in lower-SES families. Furthermore, Dearing, McCartney, and Taylor (2009) showed that low family income was less predictive of school underachievement for children exposed to high quality daycare. Both these studies support the notion that high quality care, at least non-parental, may protect children against the negative consequences of social disadvantage on cognitive functioning. However, whether this holds true with parenting, such that high quality parental care would be especially beneficial for children's EF among lower-SES families, is yet unknown. Addressing this issue, the current report investigates interactive effects between family SES and the quality of maternal behavior in the prediction of subsequent child EF.

### **Goals and hypotheses of the present study**

This report had three major goals. First, we sought to replicate previous findings that child EF is positively associated with family SES. Second, we aimed to investigate the prospective relations between different dimensions of maternal interactive behavior as observed at 1 year of age and child EF performance at 3 years. Finally, interactive effects between family SES and maternal behaviors in predicting child EF were examined. In line with findings from the daycare literature examining child cognition, and with those of previous studies on parenting and child externalizing problems, it was hypothesized that children from lower-SES families, compared to their peers from more advantaged families, would benefit to a greater degree from quality maternal behaviors, thus evidencing a protective effect of high quality parenting for less advantaged children.

## Method

### Participants

One hundred and fourteen middle-class mother-child dyads (68 girls and 46 boys) living in a large Canadian metropolitan area participated in this study. Families were recruited from birth lists provided by the Ministry of Health and Social Services. Mothers were between 20 and 45 years old ( $M = 31.41$ ;  $SD = 4.99$ ). Most mothers (87.7%) were Caucasian. They had 15.6 years of education on average (varying from 8 to 18,  $SD = 2.36$ ), with 62.3% holding a college degree (while 63.3% of parents in the province of Quebec hold a college degree; [www.stat.gouv.qc.ca](http://www.stat.gouv.qc.ca)). Family income was based on categorical scores distributed as follows: 1 < 20 K\$; 2 = 20-39K \$; 3 = 40-59K \$; 4 = 60-79K \$; 5 = 80-99K \$; 6 = 99K\$ and over. Mean family income for the sample was 4.5, while mean family income in Canada was \$74,600 for the years of data collection. Nearly all mothers (96.5%) were married or living with the child's father.

### Procedure

The mother-child dyads took part in two home visits, when children were 1 (T1;  $M = 12.58$  months,  $SD = 1.07$ ) and 3 years of age (T2;  $M = 36.82$  months,  $SD = .84$ ). Both visits lasted 70 to 90 minutes, were videotaped, and were organized in a similar way: the research assistant first conducted a brief interview with the mother, administered research tasks to the child, and then asked mothers and children to participate in dyadic activities not used in this report, except for the context that they provided for the observation of maternal behavior at T1 (used to rate the MBQS - see below). Most research tasks at T2 were EF tasks, described below. The T1 visit also included a period where mothers were asked to complete questionnaires while infants were *not* kept busy by the research assistant. This procedure was

modeled after the work of Pederson and Moran (1995), and purposely designed to create a situation where maternal attention was being solicited by both research tasks and infant's demands, with the aim of activating both the infant's attachment system and the mother's caregiving system in response. This provided an optimal context for the observation of mother-child interactions (Pederson & Moran, 1995).

In order to maximize the reliability of observations of maternal behavior, we followed Pederson and Moran's (1995) recommendations for training our home visitors. Research assistants first attended a two-day training workshop pertaining to techniques of home visiting and observation of early mother-infant interactions. They reviewed several videotapes of mother-infant interactions in order to practice using the MBQS. The assistants then performed their first few home visits with a more experienced colleague, and they completed the MBQS together. When the junior home visitors were deemed ready to rate maternal behavior, the next few visits were followed by a debriefing session with an experienced graduate student, in order to review the salient elements of the visit before scoring the MBQS. Double-coding for inter-rater reliability purposes took place only after the research assistants had gone through this process.

## **Measures**

**SES** was assessed using a questionnaire where mothers were asked to provide socio-demographic information such as their level of education and their family income. A rare case of consensus in the literature is that the power of prediction is higher when SES components are combined rather than taking each indicator singly (White, 1982). In line with this, and owing to the correlation ( $r = .65, p < .01$ ) between maternal education and family income in

this sample, these two variables were standardized and averaged, yielding a global index of maternal SES.

**Maternal interactive behavior.** The 90-item MBQS (Pederson & Moran, 1995) was used at T1 to assess maternal interactive behavior. This measure is designed to assess the quality of maternal behavior during mother-infant interactions in the home. Each item describes a potential maternal behavior. Based on observations performed throughout the entire T1 visit, the 90 items were sorted by the observers into nine piles, from most representative of the mother to least representative. Each item was thus assigned a score varying between 1 and 9, indicating the extent to which it resembled the mother's behavior as observed during the visit.

Recently, Pederson, Moran and their colleagues (e.g., Morley et al., 2010) subdivided the MBQS items into seven domains of maternal behavior: 1) Response to positive signals (12 items;  $\alpha = .83$ ; e.g., *Notices when B smiles and vocalizes*); 2) Response to distress (7 items;  $\alpha = .86$ ; e.g., *Responds immediately to cries or whimpers*); 3) Positive affect sharing (6 items;  $\alpha = .85$ ; e.g., *Praises child*); 4) Hostility/Rejection (8 items;  $\alpha = .79$ ; e.g., *Is punitive or retaliatory*); 5) Sensitivity/Responsiveness (27 items;  $\alpha = .87$ ; e.g., *Interprets cues correctly, as evidenced by child's response*); 6) Teaching orientation (9 items;  $\alpha = .54$ ; e.g., *Is instructive during interactions with child*); and 7) Physical proximity (7 items;  $\alpha = .79$ ; e.g., *Molds child to self when holding*). This multidimensional approach is used here to operationalize the quality of maternal behavior, by computing averaged scores for each dimension based on the 1-9 score assigned to each item. Given that the Teaching orientation domain showed less than satisfactory reliability, it was dropped, leaving six dimensions for further analysis.

The MBQS is anchored in the descriptions of sensitive responsiveness provided by Ainsworth, Bell, and Stayton (1974). The authors (e.g., Pederson et al., 1990; Pederson et al., 1998; Pederson & Moran, 1995) have presented detailed descriptions regarding the development of the MBQS, as well as its validity and reliability. These authors' longitudinal studies show that the MBQS is useful in predicting multiple aspects of child development. The MBQS is also significantly related to other measures of maternal behavior, such as the HOME Inventory and the Ainsworth scales (see Pederson & Moran, 1995). In this study, a second research assistant was present for 30 home visits (26%) and completed the MBQS independently. Agreement between the two raters' sorts was high, intra-class correlation = .84.

**Executive functioning** was assessed during the second home visit, when children were 3 years old. The tasks were chosen based on Carlson's (2005) empirically-derived measurement guidelines with the aim of maximizing reliable detection of individual differences in three dimensions of EF: working memory, inhibitory control, and set-shifting.

***Bear/Dragon (Reed, Pien, & Rothbart, 1984):*** This task mostly calls upon working memory and inhibition. Experimenters introduced children to two puppets: a « nice bear » and a « naughty dragon ». Children were asked to perform the actions requested by the bear only. For example when the bear asked "Touch your head" children had to touch their head, but they had to stand still if the dragon made the same request. There were two series of six requests each, alternating in a pseudo-random order requests by the bear and the dragon, all pertaining to touching a body part. Scores corresponded to the total number of correct responses, and could thus vary from 0 to 12.

***Day/Night (Gerstad, Hong, & Diamond, 1994):*** Experimenters first showed two separate pictures to children: a black card displaying stars and a moon, and a white card

displaying a yellow sun. Children were asked to say “day” when they were shown the stars and moon, and “night” when shown the sun. The task, focusing on set-shifting and inhibition, consisted of 16 trials, alternating in a random but previously defined order the sun and the moon, and children’s scores were computed as the percentage of correct answers.

***Dimensional Change Card Sort (DCCS; Zelazo, 2006):*** Experimenters showed children a red card depicting a truck, and a blue card depicting a star, and explained that they would play a sorting game. In the first round, children were instructed to classify the cards given to them, one by one, by shape. In the second round, they were instructed to sort the cards by color. Between the two rounds, the experimenter explained the new rule. There were six trials in each round. This task mostly taps into set-shifting and working memory. Scores represented the number of correct answers on the post-switch trials (0–6).

***Delay of gratification (Kochanska et al. , 2000):*** The experimenter explained children that they could take a treat, placed under a transparent cup in front of them, only when she rang the bell. Four trials of increasingly longer duration were used (5, 15, 30 and 45 seconds), tapping into inhibition. Scores were the number of seconds waited on each trial.

## **Results**

### **Preliminary analyses**

Table 1 presents the observed ranges, means and standard deviations for the domains of maternal behavior and child scores on EF tasks. All variables showed good variability, although children’s average performance on the delay of gratification trials and the DCCS was very good.

EF scores were standardized and then submitted to a principal component analysis in order to reduce the number of data points and compute reliable aggregate estimates. This

analysis yielded a two-factor solution (*Eigen* values > 1.0), representing 56.3% of the total variance. These two factors were submitted to a principal axis rotation (oblimin). Factor loadings for the 5-second Delay (.81), 15-second Delay (.92), 30-second Delay (.87), and 45-second Delay (.62) trials suggest that the first factor taps Impulse Control, whereas the second factor appears to represent working memory, set-shifting and inhibitory control (Conflict-EF): Bear/Dragon (.73), Day/Night (.72), and DCCS (.55). No cross loadings (above .32) were observed and the correlation between the two factors was .26. Studies of EF in young children have often found similar factor structures, whether using exploratory (e.g., Carlson & Moses, 2001; Carlson, Moses, & Breton, 2002; Carlson et al., 2004; Conway & Stifter, 2012 - see Beck et al., 2011) or confirmatory approaches (Carlson, White, & Davis-Unger, under review). Given that the current factor structure was very clear empirically and reproduced these two dimensions, two averaged standardized scores were computed and used in further analyses. The correlation between Impulse Control and Conflict-EF was  $r = .30, p < .001$ . Children's exact age and gender were unrelated to these two EF dimensions (all  $p$ 's > .39), and therefore not retained for further analysis.

Finally, in line with their theoretical definitions as distinct aspects of one global construct, the domains of maternal behavior were found to be moderately to highly inter-correlated, with correlations ranging from  $r = .44$  to  $r = .79$  (mean  $r = .63$ , see Table 2). The domains will nonetheless be considered separately in main analyses, given the current report's secondary aim to examine whether some maternal behaviors are more closely related than others to child EF. Indeed, it is not unusual in developmental research that highly related constructs show distinct relations to outcomes (e.g., Poulin & Boivin, 2000).

### **Main analyses**



**Family SES and child EF.** Consistent with the results of several previous studies, maternal SES was significantly related to child Impulse Control ( $r = .19, p = .03$ ) and Conflict-EF ( $r = .30, p < .001$ ).

**Maternal behaviors and child EF.** Table 2 presents the zero-order correlations between the six domains of maternal behavior and the two EF dimensions. The results are strikingly different according to which dimension of EF is considered. Hence, while no significant (or even marginal) relations were found between maternal behaviors and child Impulse Control, four of the six domains of maternal behavior were significantly related to child Conflict-EF, and one of the two remaining dimensions showed a similar although marginal trend (Hostility/Rejection;  $p = .056$ ). All significant (or marginal) relations between maternal behaviors and child performance on Conflict-EF were in the expected direction, such that mothers who were observed to be more competent during mother-infant home interactions at 1 year had children performing better on Conflict-EF two years later. In contrast, the non-significant findings with Impulse Control could suggest either that early maternal behavior is unrelated to later child Impulse Control in this sample, or that relations exist, but only for a non-random portion of the sample, which implies a moderation effect (Baron & Kenny, 1986). In line with the hypotheses of the current study, the next section examines whether the links between maternal behavior and subsequent child EF are greater among lower-SES families.

**Protective effects of high quality parenting against socio-economic disadvantage.** To address the last research question, we conducted moderation analyses to examine whether maternal behavior interacted with family SES in predicting subsequent child EF. All scores were first centered. Conflict-EF and Impulse Control were submitted to distinct sets of regression equations. In each equation, SES was entered with one of the domains of maternal

behavior in a first block, followed by their interactive product in a second block (Aiken & West, 1991). As shown in Table 3, only one of the MBQS domains (Response to Distress) interacted significantly with SES when predicting child Conflict-EF. In contrast, Table 4 shows that Response to Distress, as well as Response to Positive Signals and Physical Proximity, also interacted with SES in the prediction of child Impulse Control.

These four interactions were broken down according to guidelines provided by Aiken and West (1991), plotting fitted regression lines at pre-determined levels of the moderator, in our case at one standard deviation above and below the mean for family SES. The same pattern of results was found for all four interactions. Figures 1a to 1d illustrate that among higher-SES families, the relation between the quality of maternal behavior and child Impulse Control or Conflict-EF was non-significant for all domains considered. In contrast, the relations were positive and consistently significant among lower-SES families, such that higher quality maternal behavior was related to better child performance on EF tasks.

### **Discussion**

The primary aim of this paper was to investigate the interactive effects of family SES and maternal behaviors in predicting subsequent child EF. It was expected that family SES and several dimensions of maternal behavior would be associated to child EF performance, and that the positive links between the quality of maternal behavior and child EF would be more pronounced among children from relatively lower-SES families. Overall, the results support the hypotheses, while suggesting that important differences may exist between the developmental processes subsuming different dimensions of EF.

The results first reiterated those of previous studies by highlighting links between family SES, quality of maternal behavior, and child EF. However, while family SES was

related to both dimensions of EF, the quality of maternal behavior showed direct relations to conflict-EF only. This appeared to be a robust phenomenon, given that it was replicated across almost all domains of maternal behavior. Hence, while four of the six domains were related to conflict-EF (in addition to one trend-level association), none was related to impulse control.

Although we did not expect to find such different patterns of results for impulse control and conflict-EF, it is not usual for EF research to uncover different findings according to which dimension of EF is considered. An often used distinction is that between *cool* and *hot* EF, which resemble the dimensions of conflict-EF and impulse control, respectively. Hot EF refers to functions called upon in affectively challenging contexts, such as when children are asked to refrain from reaching for a desirable reward, while cool EF generally implies a non-affective context, for instance in tasks that only or mostly require working memory and/or set-shifting. Research has identified that these two sets of EF skills have different anatomical underpinnings, with cool EF associated with dorsolateral regions of the prefrontal cortex, and hot EF mostly subsumed by ventral and medial regions (Zelazo & Müller, 2002). Furthermore, hot and cool EF have different relations to *child* factors: Hongwanishkul, Happaney, Lee and Zelazo (2005) found links to child general intelligence, mental age and temperament for cool EF, but not for hot EF. The results of the current study suggest that conflict-EF and impulse control could show different connections to *family* factors as well, in this case parent-child interactions.

In fact, close examination of the literature suggests an interesting pattern of findings. First, we previously reported comparable results when the same children were 2 years of age, finding relations between other aspects of parenting and child conflict-EF, but not with impulse control (reference omitted for blind review). Second, the other studies reporting links

between parenting and concurrent (Bibok et al., 2009) or subsequent child EF (Blair et al., 2011; Hammond et al., 2012; Hughes & Ensor, 2009) used tasks with strong working memory and cognitive flexibility requirements. None of their tasks involved a degree of impulse control as marked as in a delay of gratification task. We would therefore argue that the links between parenting and conflict-EF are becoming increasingly robust, with concurrent and prospective links found in different samples and at different ages. However, our attempt to draw specific predictions from particular aspects of maternal behavior was inconclusive. These results probably reflect the complexity of trying to tease apart constructs that are conceptually and empirically interrelated, and this is even more so in the current study, given the methodological and empirical proximity amongst the dimensions of parenting assessed. Hence, it is best to view the findings obtained here with different aspects of maternal behavior as providing partially overlapping evidence for one global phenomenon (links between maternal behavior and child conflict-EF), rather than independent results.

In contrast, the near-zero relations we found between maternal behavior and child impulse control, if not complemented by moderation analyses, could have suggested the lack of a true relation between maternal behavior and impulse control, or appeared to be the result of a failure to measure aspects of parenting more relevant to explaining child impulse control. The moderation analyses rather indicated the presence of a phenomenon of greater theoretical and practical relevance: exposure to higher quality of some types of maternal behaviors does relate to better subsequent impulse control performance, but only among children from relatively lower-SES homes (it is unclear whether the one interaction found with conflict-EF is meaningful or rather represents a spurious finding). This is in line with previous research which suggests that less advantaged children benefit from high quality parenting (e.g.,

Schonberg & Shaw, 2007) and daycare (Dearing et al., 2009; Geoffroy et al., 2007) to a greater degree. Specifically, the results found here suggest a protective effect of high quality parenting against the disadvantage normally associated with lower SES with respect to child EF. Indeed, results suggested that when mothers were responsive to their infants' positive signals, responsive to their signals of emotional distress, and/or were often physically close and affectionate to them, infants from the less affluent families in this sample caught up with their more advantaged counterparts, and grew up to show similar impulse control performance at 3 years (see Figures 1b to 1d). However, the same children exposed to low quality maternal behaviors appeared to perform the worst. These results are all the more appealing that our sample is essentially middle-class, with generally well-educated mothers. Hence, these findings highlight the particular salience of the quality of early mother-infant interactions not only for children growing up in highly disadvantaged families, but also when socio-economic risk is moderate rather than severe. Of course, given the above-mentioned methodological and empirical proximity amongst the dimensions of maternal behavior assessed, one should not view the different interactions depicted as independent from each other, but rather as providing confirmatory evidence for one phenomenon tackled from slightly different angles.

In fact, whether considering main or interactive effects, we would argue that the exact specificity of the results will not necessarily generalize to other samples. Hence, while Table 4 appears to suggest that Response to Positive Signals, Response to Distress, and Physical Proximity are the specific aspects of maternal behavior that interact with family SES to predict child impulse control, this precise pattern may well be specific to this sample. It appears more prudent to conclude that the current findings suggest that certain aspects of maternal behavior relate to subsequent child impulse control to a greater degree in less advantaged homes.

Whether this is a broad phenomenon that describes the links between overall quality of parenting and child impulse control, or rather a particular form of interplay that applies to some but not all dimensions of parenting, remains to be investigated given that the inter-correlations amongst the MBQS domains obtained here preclude a firm suggestion in this respect.

This study presents a number of limitations, most notably the fact that the design, although longitudinal, was non-experimental, which precludes causal inference. In addition, maternal behavior was assessed only at Time 1. Therefore, we cannot rule out the possibility that part of the results be due to stability in maternal behavior, such that concurrent parenting would be responsible for some of the links uncovered between early maternal behavior and subsequent child EF. Some EF tasks also showed limited variability, suggesting that many children were performing near maximum success, which probably limited statistical power. Finally, the nature of the sample limits generalizability, while also suggesting that small variations in the SES spectrum may have an impact on how parent-child interactions influence child development.

As noted by Noble et al. (2005), creating efficient interventions begins with identifying the particular underlying factors associated with specific child cognitive abilities. The predictive relations found here between the quality of maternal behavior and subsequent child EF are consistent with the rationales of existing intervention programs that target mother-child interactions with the aim of impacting child outcomes. These interventions are usually designed for high-risk families (e.g., Dozier et al., 2006; Moss et al., 2011) and are based on the assumption that parent-child relationships constitute a key mechanism to break the intergenerational cycle of risk often characterizing disadvantaged families. The findings of this

study, suggesting that lower-SES children perform the worst on EF tasks when exposed to low quality mothering, but catch up with their more advantaged peers when experiencing high quality interactions with their mothers, provide encouraging support for interventions targeting parent-child interactions as a vehicle to improve vulnerable children's developmental outcomes. This appears to be relevant also when psychosocial risk is low overall, such as in the current sample. In light of meta-analytic data showing that brief behavioral intervention is effective in improving the quality of maternal behavior (Bakermans-Kranenburg, Van IJzendoorn, & Juffer, 2003), it appears that promoting sensitive and responsive parental behavior is feasible, realistic, and may have a positive impact on children's executive and cognitive development. The results of the current study suggest that such an approach may be beneficial to children generally, across SES levels, while being likely particularly to help protect children from less affluent families against the negative consequences of socio-economic disadvantage on their developing executive capacities.

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Table 1

*Descriptive statistics*

Measure	Range	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Maternal Behavior			
- Response to positive signals	2.36 – 8.45	7.25	1.13
- Response to distress	1.71 – 8.57	7.18	1.32
- Positive affect sharing	1.43 – 8.86	7.35	1.23
- Hostility/Rejection	1.38 – 7.38	2.92	1.05
- Sensitivity/Responsiveness	3.15 – 7.48	6.49	.84
- Physical proximity	2.00 – 8.14	6.84	1.14
Child EF performance			
- Bear/Dragon	2 – 10	6.50	2.10
- Day/Night (%)	0 – 100	60.14	34.61
- Dimensional Change Card Sort	0 – 6	5.61	.96
- Delay 5 seconds	1-5	4.84	.73
- Delay 15 seconds	1-15	13.87	3.29
- Delay 30 seconds	1-30	27.07	7.63
- Delay 45 seconds	1-45	39.85	13.06

Table 2

*Intercorrelations among family SES, maternal behaviors, and child EF scores*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. SES	-	.17†	.20*	.05	-.03	.23*	.20*	.19*	.30***
2. Response to positive signals		-	.64***	.72***	-.60***	.72***	.75***	.08	.26**
3. Response to distress			-	.49***	-.51***	.79***	.66***	-.01	.23**
4. Positive affect sharing				-	-.74***	.44***	.64***	.06	.20*
5. Hostility/Rejection					-	-.51***	-.60***	.04	-.17†
6. Sensitivity/Responsiveness						-	.68***	.08	.13
7. Physical proximity							-	.07	.32***
8. Impulse Control EF								-	.30***
9. Conflict EF									-

†  $p < .10$ ; \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Table 3

*Summary of regression analyses predicting conflict EF according to family SES, maternal behavior, and their interactions*

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>
1. SES	.22	.08	.26**	14 %
Response to positive signals	.11	.06	.17	
2. Interaction	-.13	.07	-.17†	17 %
1. SES	.21	.08	.25**	13 %
Response to distress	.08	.05	.14	
2. Interaction	-.10	.05	-.18*	16 %
1. SES	.26	.07	.31***	13 %
Positive affect sharing	.11	.05	.18*	
2. Interaction	-.10	.07	-.12	14 %
1. SES	.25	.08	.29***	13 %
Hostility/Rejection	-.10	.06	-.14	
2. Interaction	.10	.07	.13	14 %
1. SES	.24	.08	.28**	10 %
Sensitivity/Responsiveness	.05	.08	.05	
2. Interaction	-.04	.08	-.05	10 %
1. SES	.21	.08	.24**	16 %
Physical proximity	.15	.06	.24**	
2. Interaction	-.06	.07	-.08	17 %

†  $p < .10$ ; \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Table 4

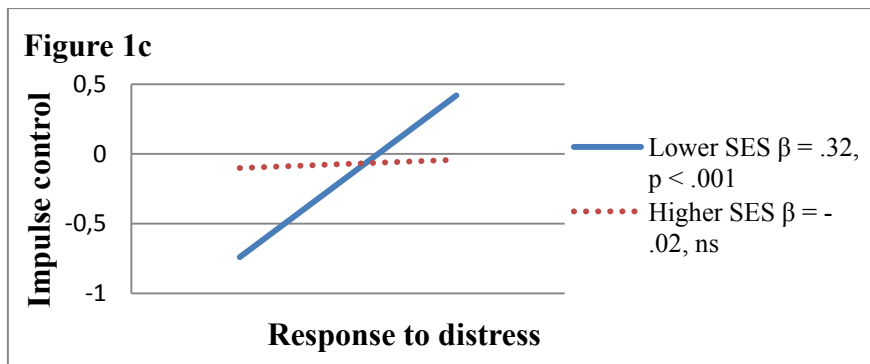
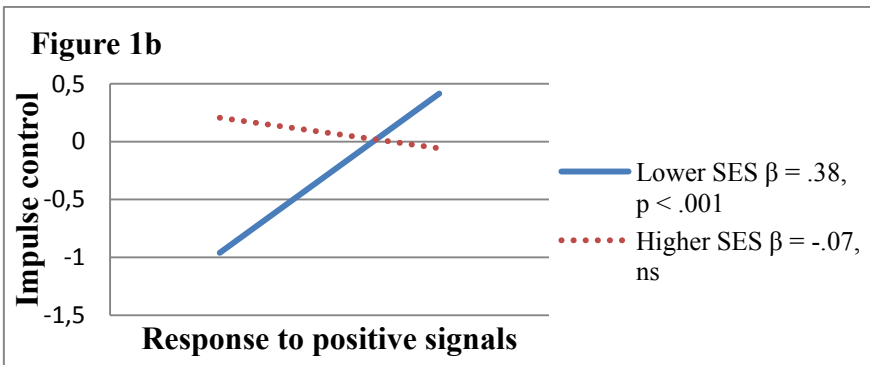
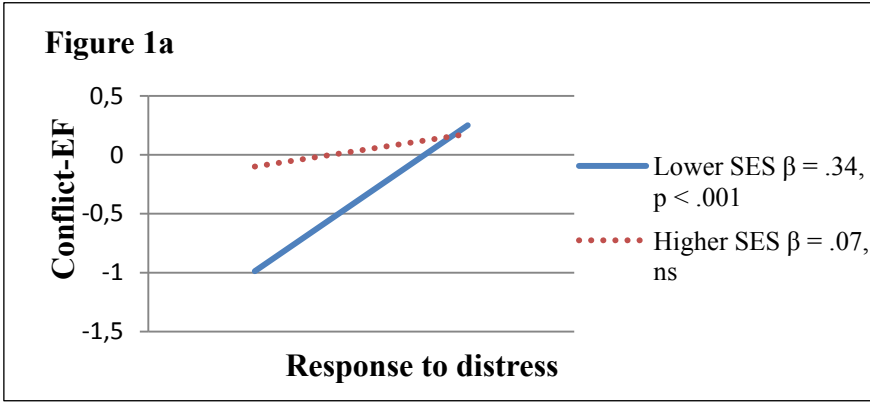
*Summary of regression analyses predicting impulse control according to family SES, maternal behavior, and their interactions*

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>
1. SES	.16	.09	.16†	4 %
Response to positive signals	.00	.07	.00	
2. Interaction	-.20	.08	-.24**	10 %
1. SES	.17	.09	.18†	4 %
Response to distress	-.06	.06	-.09	
2. Interaction	-.12	.06	-.19*	7 %
1. SES	.18	.09	.19*	4 %
Positive affect sharing	.03	.06	.05	
2. Interaction	.05	.09	.05	4 %
1. SES	.19	.09	.20*	4 %
Hostility/Rejection	.04	.07	.05	
2. Interaction	.00	.08	.00	4 %
1. SES	.14	.09	.15	4 %
Sensitivity/Responsiveness	.02	.09	.02	
2. Interaction	.15	.10	-.15	6 %
1. SES	.13	.09	.14	4 %
Physical proximity	-.02	.07	-.04	
2. Interaction	-.17	.08	-.22*	8 %

†  $p < .10$ ; \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$

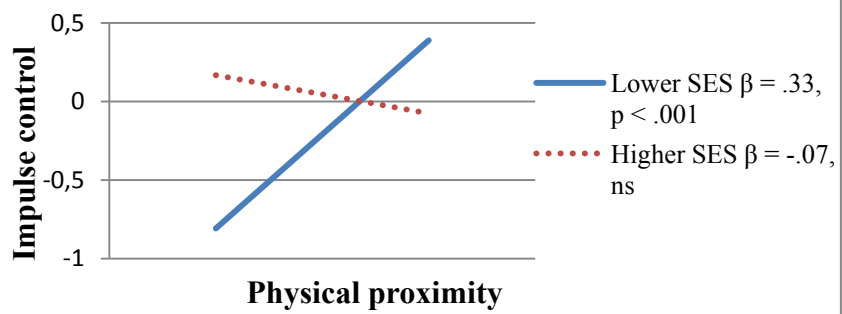
Figure 1a to 1d

*Conflict-EF and Impulse control performance according to level of specific domains of maternal behaviors*





**Figure 1d**



## Article 2

Parenting and preschoolers' executive functioning: A case of differential susceptibility?

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Running head: PARENTING, TEMPERAMENT AND EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING

Parenting and preschoolers' executive functioning: A case of differential susceptibility?

Submitted September 6, 2013

## Abstract

A growing body of theoretical and empirical work has been attempting to answer the questions of how and how much of the effects of children's early experience may depend on their inner characteristics. Theory and evidence suggest that some children, notably those with difficult temperaments, are more susceptible to both negative and positive forms of parenting. The purpose of the current study was to investigate whether child temperament moderated the links between the quality of mother-infant interactions and two components of child executive functioning (EF), namely impulse control and conflict EF, among 74 mother-child dyads. Results are consistent with the notion that children with more difficult temperaments are more susceptible to maternal behaviors than children with easier temperaments, but only regarding the development of impulse control abilities. No significant interactions were found for conflict EF. These results support the idea that distinct mechanisms may underlie the development of different dimensions of child EF.

Keywords: Parenting, temperament, differential susceptibility, executive functions, preschool children.

## Parenting and preschoolers' executive functioning: A case of differential susceptibility?

Over the course of everyday interactions parents create, or not, a coherent, warm, and predictable environment that facilitates children's adaptation to challenges and novelty (Bowlby, 1988). A long tradition of research has demonstrated that high-quality parenting plays a key role in numerous spheres of child development. Research in the field has often, however, focused on main effects, supposing that children are equally affected by parenting. As meaningful as those results are, main effect studies often do not consider interaction effects that could be important in explaining how and how much of the effects of parenting may depend on child inner characteristics (Belsky, Bakermans-Kranenburg, & Van IJzendoorn, 2007). Those inner characteristics, or susceptibility factors, usually refer to temperament, more specifically to difficult temperament that entails, mainly, negative emotionality (Belsky, 2005; Belsky & Pluess, 2009). Difficult temperament is recognized as the most valid behavioral manifestation of susceptibility that could be associated with physiological or endophenotypic particularities or to the presence of vulnerable genes or risk alleles (Ellis, Boyce, Belsky, Bakermans-Kranenburg, & Van IJzendoorn, 2011). Hence, it is proposed that certain biological characteristics of children, often manifested in their observable temperament, could moderate the association between environmental influences and various facets of child development. In line with this position, Belsky (1997; 2005) proposed the Differential Susceptibility Theory (DST), which suggests that susceptible children are more affected by negative or harsh parenting (dark side of DST) *and* benefit more than their peers from warm and responsive parenting (bright side of DST).

Research has often focused on interactions that occur in the range of poor and/or difficult environments and their negative effects on child development (Belsky & Pluess, 2009). Studies inspired by the diathesis-stress model (Monroe & Simons, 1991) and by gene-environment interaction studies (Burmeister, McInnis, & Zollner, 2008) have provided clear support for the dark side of DST. Hence, numerous studies support the hypothesis that susceptible children are at greater risk of developing cognitive, social, emotional, or physical health problems when faced with environmental challenges, including harsh parenting (e.g., Boyce, 2007; Boyce et al., 1995; Caspi et al., 2002; Eisenberg et al., 2012; McLoyd, 1998).

DST also postulates, however, that susceptible children are more receptive to supportive environments (Bakermans-Kranenburg & Van IJzendoorn, 2007; 2011; Belsky, 1997; 2005). Hence, DST highlights the importance of considering interactions that occur in rich and beneficial environments and assessing positive outcomes, not only the absence of negative environments and outcomes. Using this framework, several developmental outcomes have been examined using correlational and experimental designs. For instance, studies largely confirm that biologically susceptible preschoolers display not only the highest levels of externalizing and internalizing behavior problems when exposed to negative parenting, but also *the lowest levels* when exposed to sensitive parenting (for a meta-analysis see Bakermans-Kranenburg & Van IJzendoorn, 2011; see also Belsky, Hsieh & Crnic, 1998; Drury et al., 2012; Morrell & Murray 2003; Sturge-Apple et al., 2012). Regarding positive outcomes, results coherent with both the bright and the dark sides of DST have been found for compliance and moral internalization (Feldman, Grennbaum, & Yirmiya, 1999; Kochanska, Kim, Barry, & Philibert, 2011), prosocial and donating behaviors (Bakermans-Kranenburg & Van IJzendoorn, 2011; Knafo, Israel, & Ebstein, 2011), social competence (Kochanska et al.,

2011), and attachment security (Klein, Velderman, Bakermans-Kranenburg, Juffer, & Van IJzendoorn, 2006).

Hence, there is compelling empirical evidence that more biologically susceptible children can benefit to a greater degree from positive environments, and experience more adverse consequences when exposed to detrimental conditions. Remarkably however, this question has received very little empirical attention with respect to one of the pillars of child development: cognitive functioning.

### **Parenting and executive functioning: A case of differential susceptibility?**

In the last decade, developmental science has paid particular attention to executive functioning (EF), which refers to a set of higher-order cognitive skills, such as working memory, set-shifting, inhibitory control, and planning, that play a central role in the control of thought and action (Garon, Bryson, & Smith, 2008). The quality of parental behavior during parent-child interactions is increasingly recognized as one of the most promising predictors of individual differences in young children's EF. For instance, studies found that better parental scaffolding was related to better child performance on EF tasks, either concurrently (Bibok, Carpendale, & Müller, 2009) or longitudinally (Bernier, Carlson & Whipple, 2010; Hammond, Müller, Carpendale, Bibok, & Liebermann-Finestone, 2012; Hughes & Ensor, 2009).

An important consideration, however, is that the links to parenting appear to vary according to which aspect of child EF is under study. Several studies have demonstrated that child performance on EF tasks clusters in factors (e.g., Garon et al., 2008), with a two-factor structure often reported among toddlers and preschoolers (see Beck, Schaefer, Pang, & Carlson, 2011): “impulse control” (similar to “hot EF”), that is, the ability to delay or suppress an impulsive response, and “conflict EF” (similar to “cool EF”), the ability to respond

appropriately in the face of a salient conflicting response option. Impulse control refers to functions called upon in affectively challenging contexts, while conflict EF generally implies a non-affective context, for instance in tasks that only or mostly require working memory and/or set-shifting with moderate degrees of inhibitory control. Research has identified that these two sets of EF skills have different anatomical underpinnings, with impulse control mostly subsumed by ventral and medial regions, and conflict EF associated with dorsolateral regions of the prefrontal cortex (Zelazo & Müller, 2002). Furthermore, hot and cool EF appear to have different relations to both child and parenting factors. Hongwanishkul, Happaney, Lee and Zelazo (2005) found links to child general intelligence, mental age and temperament for cool EF, but not for hot EF.

With respect to parenting, several studies have found links between different aspects of mother-child interactions and child conflict EF (Bernier et al., 2010; Bernier, Carlson, Deschênes, & Matte-Gagné, 2012; Blair et al., 2011; Hammond et al., 2012; Hughes & Ensor, 2009), while attempts at finding similar relations with impulse control have been unsuccessful (Bernier et al., 2010, 2012). Unexpectedly weak relations between a predictor and an outcome are often due to the presence of a moderating effect, that is, the expected association is present but only for a specific and non-random portion of the population, and thus goes undetected with a main effects analysis. Therefore, previous inconclusive findings pertaining to child impulse control might be due to a phenomenon of differential susceptibility, such that relations to parenting do exist, but only among temperamentally difficult children. In fact, indirect evidence pertaining to EF-like skills suggests that this may be the case: findings consistent with the notion of differential susceptibility have been reported for self-control and compliance (Feldman, Greenbaum, & Yirmiya, 1999) as well as self-regulation and effortful



control (Cipriano & Stifter 2010; Kochanska, Philibert, & Barry, 2009; Stams, Juffer, & Van IJzendoorn, 2002).

Conway and Stifter (2012) were the first to explore interactions between child temperament and maternal behaviors in the prediction of child EF. Three types of temperament, namely inhibited (which refers to a facet of difficult temperament), exuberant, and low reactive, and two types of maternal behaviors during problem-solving, namely attention maintaining and attention redirection, were assessed at 2 years of age in the laboratory. Both EF dimensions (impulse control and conflict EF) were assessed as well, two and a half years later. Maternal attention maintaining referred to verbal and non-verbal behaviors that support child attention to keep the focus on the task (e.g., asking questions, commenting and describing the task), whereas maternal attention-redirecting behaviors referred to verbal and non-verbal behaviors that redirect child attention away from the task. Results suggested that maternal attention-maintaining behaviors predicted higher levels of conflict EF, but only for inhibited and exuberant children. Also, maternal attention redirection predicted poorer impulse control and conflict EF, but only for inhibited children. Overall, these results are consistent with the notion that parenting may relate to child EF to a greater degree among temperamentally difficult children.

It may also be important to note that Conway and Stifter (2012) measured maternal behaviors that precisely support (or hinder) attention regulation, a core ability subsuming conflict EF, and found more compelling results with conflict EF than impulse control. This raises the possibility that the functional link between the aspect of parenting considered and the specific executive processes predicted may play a role in interactions with temperament. In fact, the less convincing picture obtained in predicting impulse control led Conway and Stifter

to suggest that a greater understanding of the relation between parenting and EF requires an examination of specific parenting behaviors. Given that links to parenting have proven more challenging to demonstrate in the case of impulse control than conflict EF, whether considering main (Bernier et al., 2010; 2012) or interactive effects (Conway & Stifter), this report examines maternal behaviors emanating from attachment research, which are more likely to support child emotion regulation, and hence the affective demands inherent to impulse control (Beck et al., 2011).

One measure of maternal behavior that is heavily influenced by attachment research is the Maternal Behavior Q-Sort (MBQS; Pederson & Moran, 1995). The MBQS has traditionally been used to derive one score of overall maternal sensitivity. However, the authors of the instrument argue that the sole use of this global score may result in significant loss in data precision, and have developed seven domains of maternal behavior that can be extracted from the MBQS: response to positive signals, response to distress, positive affect sharing, hostility/rejection, sensitivity/responsiveness, physical proximity, and teaching orientation. The first six of these seven domains appear likely to support (or hinder) especially the development of child emotion regulation, while the last is more proximal to the type of maternal behaviors assessed by Conway and Stifter (2012). The MBQS will thus allow us to examine several aspects of maternal behavior that may be especially relevant to understanding the development of child impulse control. Therefore, the present study uses these domains to assess the quality of maternal behavior, with the aim of investigating whether dimensions of parenting that are relevant to emotion regulation relate to individual differences in child impulse control among children with difficult temperaments. We also sought to explore

whether we could replicate Conway and Stifter's results with the use of the teaching orientation domain.

### **Goals and hypotheses of the present study**

The main purpose of this report was to investigate whether child temperament moderated the links between the quality of mother-infant interactions and two components of subsequent child EF, namely conflict EF and impulse control. Given increasing empirical evidence suggesting that different dimensions of maternal behavior can have distinct contributions to child functioning (e.g., Meins, Fernyhough, Fradley, & Tuckey, 2001; Moran, Forbes, Evans, Tarabulsy, & Madigan, 2008), including to child EF (Bernier et al., 2010; 2012), this study adopted a multidimensional approach to maternal caregiving. Based on previous results with other developmental outcomes (for a meta-analysis see Bakermans-Kranenburg & Van IJzendoorn, 2011) and the recent results of Conway and Stifter (2012), we hypothesized that compared to their easier counterparts, children with more difficult temperaments would be more vulnerable to higher negative and lower positive maternal behaviors, *and* would benefit more from lower negative and higher positive maternal behaviors that support emotion regulation, especially in the sphere of impulse control. Furthermore, although only one dimension of maternal behavior is available in the MBQS that resembles the behaviors assessed by Conway and Stifter, it was used to test the hypothesis that children with more difficult temperaments would be more susceptible to their mothers' teaching orientation, perhaps especially in the case of conflict EF, more dependent on attention regulation.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Seventy-four mother-child dyads (33 boys and 41 girls) living in a large Canadian metropolitan area participated in this study. Families were recruited from birth lists provided by the Ministry of Health and Social Services. Criteria for participation were full-term pregnancy and the absence of any known physical or mental disability or severe developmental delay in the infant. Mothers were between 20 and 45 years old ( $M = 31.50$ ;  $SD = 4.27$ ). They had approximately 15 years of education on average ( $M = 15.61$ ;  $SD = 2.16$ ) and the majority (90.5%) was Caucasian. Family income varied from less than \$20,000 to more than \$100,000 CDN, with an average of \$70,000 CDN. Most mothers (90.5%) were married or living with the child's father, while 8.1% were in a blended family and one was a single mother.

### **Procedure**

The mother-child dyads took part in three home visits, when children were 12 months (T1;  $M = 12.50$  months;  $SD = 1.12$ ), 15 months (T2;  $M = 15.40$  months;  $SD = .79$ ) and 3 years of age (T3;  $M = 36.82$  months;  $SD = .86$ ). All visits lasted 70 to 90 minutes and were organized in a similar way: the research assistant first administered research tasks, and mothers and children were then asked to participate in different dyadic activities that are not used in this report, except for the context that they provided for the observation of maternal behavior at T1, later used to rate the MBQS (see below). Child temperament was assessed by maternal report when children were 15 months (T2). The questionnaire was completed by mothers after the home visit and returned by mail. Most research tasks at T3 were EF tasks, described below.

The first home visit also included a period where mothers were asked to complete questionnaires while infants were not looked after or kept busy by the research assistant. The

procedure for this visit was modeled after the work of Pederson and Moran (1995), and aimed at challenging mothers' capacity to divide their attention between several competing demands, thus reproducing the natural conditions of daily life when caring for an infant. The home-visit protocol was thus purposely designed to create a situation where maternal attention was being solicited by both the research tasks and the infant's demands, which placed the dyad in a challenging situation, likely to activate both the infant's attachment system and the mother's caregiving system. This provided an optimal context for the observation of mother-child interactions (Pederson & Moran, 1995).

Given its central role in the current study, great care went into the assessment of maternal behavior. In order to maximize the reliability of observations, we followed Pederson and Moran's (1995) recommendations for training our home visitors. Research assistants first attended a two-day training workshop pertaining to 1) early mother-infant interactions, 2) behavioral observation, and 3) techniques of home visiting. They reviewed several videotapes of mother-infant interactions in order to practice using the MBQS. After the workshop, the assistants performed their first few home visits with a more experienced colleague, and they completed the MBQS together. When the junior home visitors were ready to rate maternal behavior without the assistance of a colleague, the next two or three visits were followed by a debriefing session either with the P.I. or with an experienced graduate student, in order to review the salient elements of the visit before scoring the MBQS. The assistants then went on to rating the MBQS independently.

## **Measures**

**Maternal behaviors.** The 90-item Maternal Behavior Q-Sort (MBQS; Pederson & Moran, 1995) was used at T1 (1 year of age) to assess the quality of maternal behavior. This

measure is designed to assess the quality of maternal behavior during mother-child interactions in the home. Each item describes a potential maternal behavior. Based on observations performed throughout the T1 visit, the 90 items were sorted by the observer into nine piles (10 items in each pile), according to their degree of resemblance with the mother's observed behavior. Items in the ninth pile are those that are most representative of the mother and they receive a score of 9. Items in the first pile are those that are least representative of the mother and receive a score of 1. Items in the second pile receive a score of 2, and so on. Each item is thus assigned a score between 1 and 9, indicating the extent to which it resembles the mother's behavior as observed during the visit.

Recently, Pederson, Moran and their colleagues (e.g., Morley et al., 2010) subdivided the MBQS items into seven domains of maternal behavior: 1) Response to positive signals (12 items;  $\alpha = .75$ ; e.g., *Notices when B smiles and vocalizes*); 2) Response to distress (7 items;  $\alpha = .83$ ; e.g., *Responds immediately to cries or whimpers*); 3) Positive affect sharing (6 items;  $\alpha = .76$ ; e.g., *Praises child*); 4) Hostility/Rejection (8 items;  $\alpha = .59$ ; e.g., *Is punitive or retaliatory*); 5) Sensitivity/Responsiveness (27 items;  $\alpha = .71$ ; e.g., *Interprets cues correctly, as evidenced by child's response*); 6) Teaching orientation (9 items;  $\alpha = .39$ ; e.g., *Is instructive during interactions with child*); and 7) Physical proximity (7 items;  $\alpha = .72$ ; e.g., *Molds child to self when holding*). This multidimensional approach is used here to operationalize the quality of maternal behavior. Given the low reliability for the Teaching orientation domain in the current sample (presented above), it is not considered further.

The development of the MBQS is anchored in attachment theory, and specifically in the descriptions of sensitive responsiveness provided by Ainsworth, Bell, and Stayton (1974). Pederson, Moran and their colleagues (e.g., Pederson et al., 1990; Pederson, Gleason, Moran,

& Bento, 1998; Pederson & Moran, 1995) have presented detailed descriptions regarding the development of the MBQS, as well as its validity and reliability. These authors' longitudinal studies, and those of other labs (e.g., Laranjo, Bernier, & Meins, 2008; Lemelin, Tarabulsy, & Provost, 2006) show that the MBQS is useful in predicting multiple aspects of infant development. Moreover, the MBQS is significantly correlated with other assessments of maternal behavior, such as the HOME Inventory and the Ainsworth scales (see Pederson & Moran, 1995). The predictive validity of the MBQS is well demonstrated by meta-analytic data, which reveal that it is currently the sensitivity measure that is most predictive of infant attachment security (Van IJzendoorn, Vereijken, Bakermans-Kranenburg, & Riksen-Walraven, 2004). In this study, a second research assistant was present for 18 home visits (24.3%) and completed the MBQS independently. Agreement between the two raters' sorts was high, intra-class correlation = .87.

**Temperament.** When children were 15 months (T2), their mothers completed the *Infant Characteristics Questionnaire*, 13-24-month version (ICQ; Bates, Freeland, & Lounsbury, 1979). This instrument assesses mothers' perceptions of their child's characteristics with 32 items tapping into four temperamental dimensions: unadaptability, persistence, difficultness, and social fear. Mothers are asked to rate, on a 7-point Likert scale, the degree to which their child's behavior corresponds to the items. Higher scores indicate that the mother finds her child to be more unadaptable, persistent, difficult, or displaying more social fear. The ICQ has good psychometric properties. Internal consistency varies from .53 to .82 depending on the subscale (Wright-Guerin & Gottfried, 1994). Merbert (1989) reports moderate to high associations between the 6-month version and the 13-24-month version ( $r = .58$  to  $.83$ ), suggesting good stability. Cross-reporter correspondence (mother and father)

varies from .31 to .59 across subscales (Mebert, 1989). As mentioned in the introduction, difficultness has been shown to be the most reliable behavioral expression of the susceptibility factor (Belsky, 2005). The difficultness score is therefore used here to index child temperament ( $\alpha = .85$ ).

**Executive functioning** was assessed at T3, when children were 3 years old. The tasks were chosen based on Carlson's (2005) empirically-derived measurement guidelines with the aim of maximizing reliable detection of individual differences in three dimensions of EF: working memory, inhibitory control, and set-shifting.

***Bear/Dragon*** (Reed, Pien, & Rothbart, 1984). This task mostly calls upon working memory and inhibition. Experimenters introduced children to two puppets: a « nice bear » and a « naughty dragon ». Children were asked to perform the actions requested by the bear only. For example when the bear asked “Touch your head” children had to touch their head, but they had to stand still if the dragon made the same request. There were two series of six requests each, alternating in a pseudo-random order requests by the bear and the dragon, all pertaining to touching a body part. Scores corresponded to the total number of correct responses, and could thus vary from 0 to 12.

***Day/Night*** (Gerstad, Hong, & Diamond, 1994). Experimenters first showed two separate pictures to children: a black card displaying stars and a moon, and a white card displaying a yellow sun. Children were asked to say “day” when they were shown the stars and moon, and “night” when shown the sun. The task, focusing on set-shifting and inhibition, consisted of 16 trials, alternating in a random but previously defined order the sun and the moon, and children's scores were computed as the percentage of correct answers.



***Dimensional Change Card Sort*** (DCCS; Zelazo, 2006). Experimenters showed children a red card depicting a truck, and a blue card depicting a star, and explained that they would play a sorting game. In the first round, children were instructed to classify the cards given to them, one by one, by shape. In the second round, they were instructed to sort the cards by color. Between the two rounds, the experimenter explained the new rule. There were six trials in each round. This task mostly taps into set-shifting and working memory. Scores represented the number of correct answers on the post-switch trials (0–6).

***Delay of Gratification*** (Kochanska, Murray, & Harlan, 2000). The experimenter explained children that they could take a treat, placed under a transparent cup in front of them, only when she rang the bell. Four trials of increasingly longer duration were used (5, 15, 30 and 45 seconds), tapping into inhibition. Scores were the number of seconds waited on each trial.

**Child verbal ability.** Given the well-documented links between child EF and verbal ability (e.g., Carlson, Mandell, & Williams, 2004), the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test 3 (PPVT-3; Dunn & Dunn, 1997) was used to index verbal ability at 3 years. The PPVT-3 is a widely used norm-referenced test of receptive vocabulary for ages 2.5 and above.

## **Results**

### **Preliminary analyses**

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the domains of maternal behavior, child temperament, and child scores on EF tasks. All variables showed good variability, although children's average performance on the delay of gratification trials was very good.

EF scores were standardized and then submitted to a principal component analysis in order to reduce the number of data points and compute reliable aggregate estimates. This

analysis yielded a two-factor solution (*Eigen* values > 1.0), representing 61.1% of the total variance. These two factors were submitted to a principal axis rotation (oblimin). Factor loadings for the 5-second Delay (.85), 15-second Delay (.95), 30-second Delay (.91), and 45-second Delay (.42) trials suggest that the first factor taps impulse control, whereas the second factor appears to represent working memory and set-shifting (conflict EF): Bear/Dragon (.73), Day/Night (.76), and DCCS (.59). No cross loadings were observed and the correlation between the two factors was  $r = .23, p < .05$ . Studies of EF in young children have found similar factor structures (e.g., Carlson et al., 2004; Carlson & Moses, 2001; Conway & Stifter, 2012). Given that the current factor structure was very clear empirically and reproduced these two documented dimensions, two averaged standardized scores were computed and used in further analyses.

Children's sex and exact age were unrelated to Impulse Control or Conflict EF, and therefore not retained for further analysis. However, concurrent language skills were significantly related to Conflict EF,  $r = .26, p < .05$ , and marginally to Impulse Control,  $r = .22, p < .10$ . Child language will therefore be considered in the final analyses.

In line with their theoretical definitions as distinct aspects of one global construct, the six domains of maternal behaviors were found to be moderately to highly inter-correlated, with correlations ranging from  $r = .30$  (Response to positive signals – Hostility/Rejection) to  $r = .70$  (Response to distress – Sensitivity/Responsiveness) (mean  $r = .49$ ). Given our study aims, the six domains will be considered separately in the analyses. In fact, it is not unusual in developmental research that highly related constructs show distinct relations to outcomes (see for instance Poulin & Boivin, 2000).

As shown in Table 2, no relations were found between the moderator (child difficultness) and the outcomes (subsequent performance on either Impulse Control or Conflict EF), which constitutes a condition to test for differential susceptibility (Belsky et al., 2007). Three domains of maternal behaviors were found to relate to Impulse Control (Positive affect sharing,  $r = .33, p < .01$ ; Hostility/Rejection,  $r = -.26, p < .05$ ; Physical proximity,  $r = .27, p < .05$ ).

### **Main analyses**

In order to test the hypotheses of the current study, we next examined whether the links between maternal behavior and subsequent child EF were greater among more difficult children. We thus conducted moderation analyses to examine whether maternal behavior interacted with difficult temperament in predicting subsequent child EF. Impulse Control and Conflict EF were submitted to distinct sets of regression equations. In each equation, difficult temperament was entered with one of the domains of maternal behavior (both centered), followed by their interactive product.

As displayed in Table 3, child difficultness interacted with all six domains of maternal behavior considered in the prediction of child Impulse Control (all  $p$ 's  $< .01$ ). These interactions were broken down according to guidelines provided by Aiken and West (1991) and Cohen and Cohen (1983), plotting fitted regression lines at pre-determined levels of the moderator, in our case at one standard deviation above and below the mean for difficult temperament.

As shown in Figures 1a to 1f, the results are in line with the differential susceptibility hypothesis: the links between the quality of maternal behavior and child subsequent Impulse Control were positive (negative in the case of Hostility/Rejection) and significant for more

difficult children ( $\beta$ 's varying between .41 and .52, all  $p$ 's < .01), while they were low (all  $\beta$ 's < .19) and consistently non-significant for children considered to be less difficult. Hence, the expected positive links between the quality of maternal behavior and child subsequent Impulse Control were greater and significant only among more difficult children.

In contrast, Table 4 shows that only one interaction with child difficultness was significant when predicting Conflict EF: that involving maternal Sensitivity/Responsiveness. While the direction of this interaction was the same as those for Impulse Control reported above, post-hoc tests revealed that the link between maternal Sensitivity/Responsiveness and child Conflict EF was non-significant, both for more difficult ( $\beta = .25, ns$ ) and for less difficult ( $\beta = -.23, ns$ ) children.

Finally, we re-ran all regression analyses while entering child language in a first block. The results remained almost the same, for both Conflict EF (no significant interaction) and Impulse Control (five significant and one marginally significant interactions).

### **Discussion**

The aim of this paper was to investigate whether child temperament moderated the links between the quality of early mother-infant interactions and two components of subsequent child EF, namely impulse control and conflict EF. It was expected that children with a relatively more difficult temperament would be more susceptible to higher negative and lower positive maternal behaviors, and would benefit more from higher positive and lower negative behaviors, compared to children with a relatively easier temperament. Due to the nature of the maternal behaviors assessed, these moderating effects were expected mainly in the sphere of impulse control. Overall, results were consistent with these hypotheses.

To infer a differential susceptibility effect, some criteria need to be met (Belsky, 1997; 2005). As shown in Figure 1a to 1f, all slopes pertaining to more difficult children are significantly different from zero, but also significantly steeper than the slopes for less difficult children. The fact that the low difficultness slopes are all non-significant, along with the absence of relation between temperament and impulse control, are further evidence of differential susceptibility. Furthermore, no relations were found between temperament and any domain of maternal behaviors (see Kraemer, Stice, Kazdin, Offord, & Kupfer, 2001). Finally, the multidimensional approach to maternal behavior allowed us to consider the degree of different positive and negative maternal behaviors, not just the absence of one or another. The results show that children with more difficult temperaments who are exposed to hostile and negative maternal behaviors, and/or to low levels of positive behaviors at one year, performed the worst two years later on impulse control (dark side of DST), but these children actually performed the best when experiencing positive, warm and responsive maternal behaviors and/or low levels of negative behaviors (bright side of DST). The consistency of results across the six domains of maternal behaviors, despite the moderate inter-relations observed between these domains, suggests the robustness of these results. In contrast, there was very little evidence of differential susceptibility when predicting child conflict EF.

The specificity of the results to impulse control may relate to the fact that abilities related to impulse control call upon systems affected by genetic susceptibility. Indeed, numerous differential susceptibility studies considered physiological or endophenotypic particularities and/or the presence of vulnerable genes or risk alleles as susceptibility factors mainly related to the dopaminergic system that is involved in motivational and reward mechanisms (Ellis et al., 2011; Tripp & Wickens, 2008). Belsky (1997) speculated that high

negativity in children is the behavioral manifestation of a highly sensitive nervous system that has to be regulated by caregivers. This sensory sensitivity to environmental input has also been associated with the dopamine system (Aron & Aron, 1997; Posner & Rothbart, 2007). Considering this and the significant interactions found here between child temperament and maternal behaviors that mainly support emotion regulation, it appears to be a sound possibility that the development of impulse control in the preschool period be a case of differential susceptibility.

Recall also that Conway and Stifter (2012) investigated similar questions and rather found more convincing interactions with conflict EF, however by examining maternal behaviors which support children's attention systems. We were unable to replicate these findings, given that only one dimension of the MBQS taps into such behaviors (teaching orientation), and this dimension could not be assessed reliably with our sample. Nonetheless, the two studies appear to converge toward two broad conclusions. First, the links between parenting and EF development in the preschool period may represent a case of differential susceptibility. Second, the exact nature of the interactions at play between maternal behaviors and child temperament could vary according to which executive processes are considered. Future studies using a theoretically driven multidimensional approach to the assessment of parenting are necessary to investigate the possibility that child temperament interacts specifically with parental behaviors with clear functional connections to the particular dimensions of child EF that are being predicted. It is conceivable, although hypothetical, that interactions with parental behaviors aimed at supporting children's attention systems could be more relevant to explaining conflict EF, while interactions between temperament and parental

behaviors mostly serving an emotion regulation function may explain more variability in the impulse control component of child EF.

This study presents a number of limitations, first the modest sample size which may have limited our ability to detect some interactive effects by reducing statistical power. Second, the use of only one task to assess impulse control may have reduced variation. A more optimal approach would entail the use of several tasks with different behavioral demands (e.g., Kochanska et al., 2009). Furthermore, we assessed child temperament via maternal report. This presents the advantage of tapping into a broad range of child behavioral and emotional characteristics, potentially more representative of children's everyday functioning than lab-based observational measures. However, the addition of an observational assessment would surely produce more objective estimates. Finally, although we have sometimes used causal language to simplify matters, no causal inference can be drawn from the current, correlational design.

Considering the current results with those of the only other study that specifically investigated interactions between child temperament and parenting in predicting child EF (Conway & Stifter, 2012), we would argue that much more research is needed to clarify which types of maternal behavior interact with which aspects of child temperament in the prediction of different child executive processes. Answers to these questions may vary with child age as well. Becoming more specific in the identification of the antecedents of child EF and their interactions with inner child characteristics will be relevant to the development of intervention programs targeting specific cognitive processes to reduce impulsivity and support self-regulatory capacities. In light of meta-analytic data showing that brief behavioral intervention is effective in improving the quality of maternal behavior (Bakermans-Kranenburg, Van

IJzendoorn, & Juffer, 2003), it appears that promoting competent parenting is realistic. The next step is to identify which aspects of parenting should be targeted with which children, and whether this differs according to the particular developmental outcomes that one aims to improve.



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Table 1

*Descriptive statistics for the key study variables*

Measure	Range	Mean	Standard deviation
Maternal behavior :			
- Response to positive signals	4.09-8.45	7.32	.90
- Response to distress	2.86-8.57	7.24	1.18
- Positive affect Sharing	1.43-8.71	7.46	1.00
- Hostility/Rejection	1.38-6.50	2.69	.81
- Sensitivity/Responsiveness	4.33-7.48	6.50	.86
- Physical proximity	2.29-8.14	6.77	1.04
Temperament : Difficultness	1.81-4.56	3.00	.72
Bear/Dragon	3-10	6.59	2.01
Day/Night (%)	0-100	58.17	35.20
DCCS	0-6	5.54	1.06
Delay of Gratification			
- 5 seconds	0-5	4.74	.94
- 15 seconds	1-15	13.54	3.86
- 30 seconds	1-30	27.37	7.29
- 45 seconds	0-45	40.11	13.15

Table 2

*Intercorrelations among child sex, age, temperament, maternal behaviors, and child EF*

	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Sex	.07	-.05	.16	.13	-.02	.13	.23*	.01	.05	.16
2. Age	-	-.07	.20†	.00	.05	-.07	.09	.28**	.22†	.09
3. Temperament		-	.07	.10	-.02	.08	.14	.10	-.05	-.13
4. Response to positive signals			-	.63***	.49***	-.30**	.54***	.58***	.17	.01
5. Response to distress				-	.41***	-.31**	.70***	.60***	.16	-.04
6. Positive affect sharing					-	-.56***	.31**	.55***	.33**	.08
7. Hostility/Rejection						-	-.38**	-.49***	-.26*	.10
8. Sensitivity/Responsiveness							-	.51***	.13	-.05
9. Physical proximity								-	.27*	.02
10. Impulse Control									-	.23*
11. Conflict EF										-

†  $p < .10$ ; \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Table 3

*Summary of regression analyses predicting impulse control according to maternal behavior, temperament and their interactions*

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	$R^2$
1. Difficult Temperament	-.04	.12	-.04	3 %
Response to positive signals	.22	.10	.25*	
2. Interaction	.37	.13	.32**	13 %
1. Difficult Temperament	-.01	.12	-.01	3 %
Response to distress	.18	.08	.26*	
2. Interaction	.32	.11	.35**	14 %
1. Difficult Temperament	-.01	.12	-.01	11 %
Positive affect sharing	.18	.09	.22†	
2. Interaction	.34	.13	.30**	19 %
1. Difficult Temperament	.00	.12	.00	7 %
Hostility/Rejection	-.15	.11	-.15	
2. Interaction	-.46	.14	-.37**	19 %
1. Difficult Temperament	-.02	.13	-.02	2 %
Sensitivity/Responsiveness	.19	.11	.20†	
2. Interaction	.45	.17	.32**	12 %
1. Difficult Temperament	-.01	.12	-.01	8 %
Physical proximity	.18	.08	.24*	
2. Interaction	.29	.09	.35**	20 %

†  $p < .10$ ; \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$

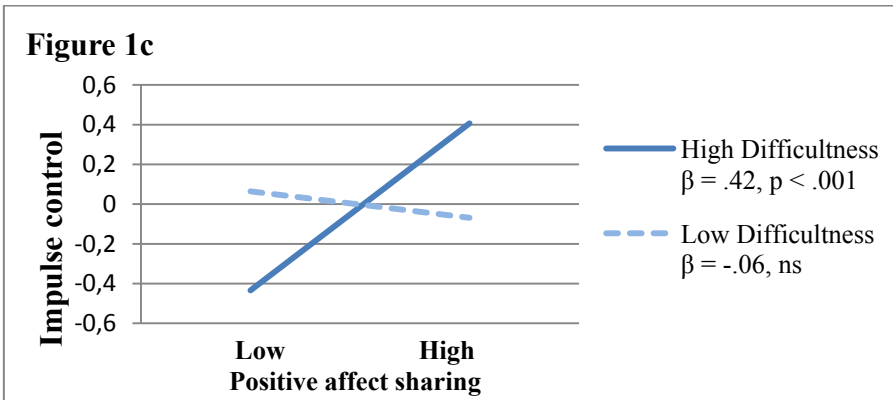
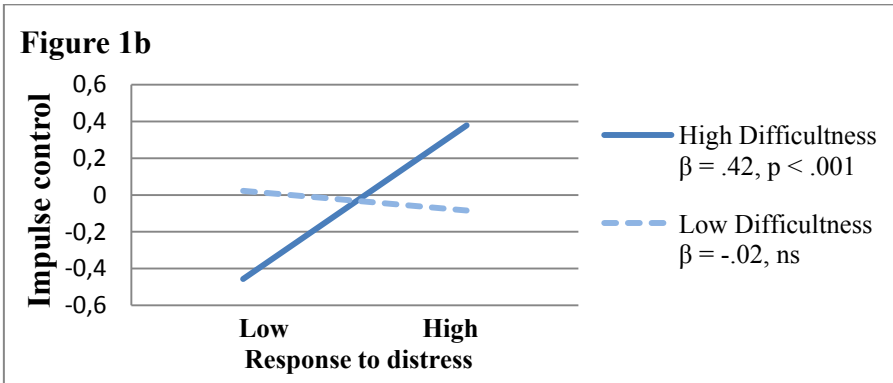
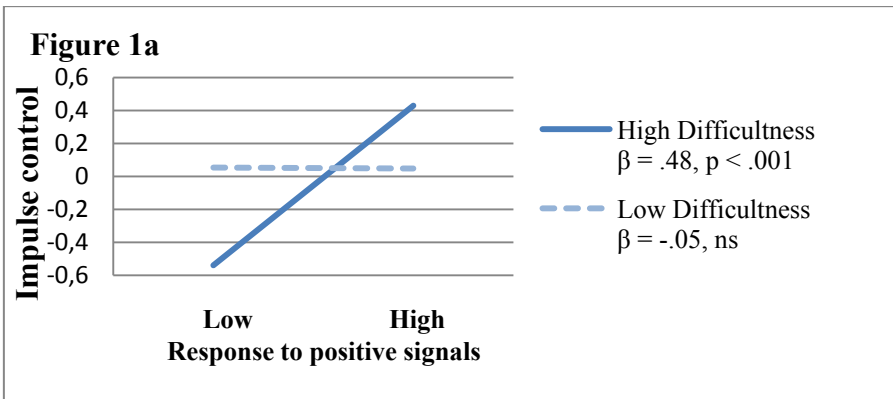
Table 4

*Summary of regression analyses predicting conflict EF according to maternal behavior, difficult temperament and their interactions*

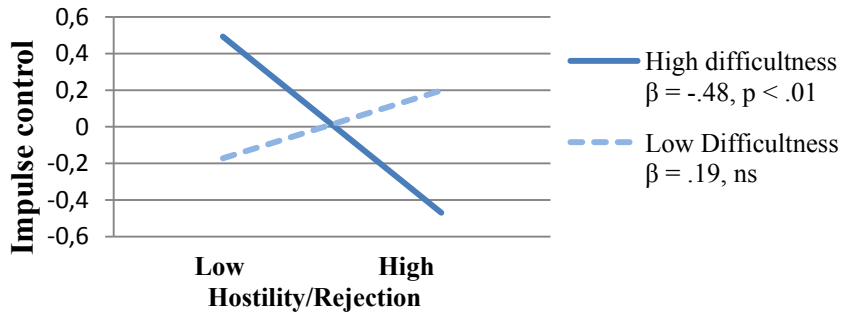
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>
1. Difficult Temperament	-.12	.12	-.12	2 %
Response to positive signals	.04	.10	.05	
2. Interaction	.14	.13	.13	3 %
1. Difficult Temperament	-.10	.12	-.10	2 %
Response to distress	.02	.08	.02	
2. Interaction	.17	.11	.20	5 %
1. Difficult Temperament	-.10	.12	-.10	2 %
Positive affect sharing	.00	.09	.00	
2. Interaction	.23	.13	.22†	6 %
1. Difficult Temperament	-.13	.12	-.13	3 %
Hostility/Rejection	.14	.11	.15	
2. Interaction	-.16	.15	-.13	4 %
1. Difficult Temperament	-.09	.12	-.08	2 %
Sensitivity/Responsiveness	.01	.10	.01	
2. Interaction	.33	.16	.24*	7 %
1. Difficult Temperament	-.12	.13	-.11	2%
Physical proximity	.02	.09	.02	
2. Interaction	.07	.10	.09	2 %

†  $p < .10$ ; \* $p < .05$

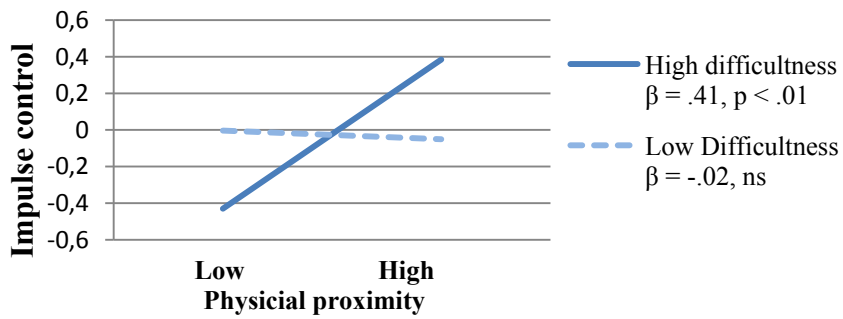
Figures 1a to 1f: Impulse Control performance according to specific domains of maternal behavior and level of child difficulty



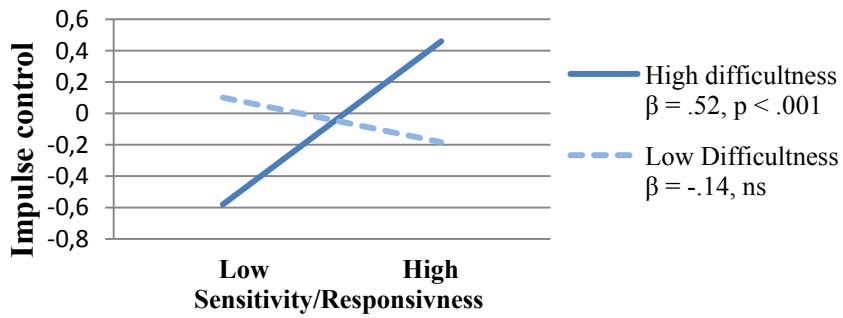
**Figure 1d**



**Figure 1e**



**Figure 1f**





## **Conclusion**

### **Rappel des objectifs et résultats**

L'objectif général de la thèse était de contribuer à l'avancement des connaissances en tentant de préciser le rôle des comportements maternels observés en bas âge dans le développement des fonctions exécutives (FE) mesurées à l'âge préscolaire. Tel que présenté dans les deux articles, il est largement reconnu que les enfants ne sont pas affectés au même degré par les influences environnementales et plus particulièrement par la qualité des comportements parentaux (Belsky, Bakermans-Kranenburg, & Van IJzendoorn, 2007). En ce sens, la recherche développementale contemporaine souligne l'importance d'analyser le développement de l'enfant dans son contexte, en tenant compte des interactions entre les différentes sources d'influence sur ce développement (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Douglas, 2010; Sameroff & Mackenzie, 2003). Concurrément, les articles théoriques et empiriques sur le développement des FE durant l'enfance se sont multipliés dans les vingt dernières années (Zelazo & Carlson, 2012). Rappelons que cet intérêt marqué et encore grandissant s'explique par l'importance que semblent jouer ces fonctions cognitives dans plusieurs sphères déterminantes du développement de l'enfant de même que les fréquents déficits au niveau des FE observés au sein de groupes cliniques tels que les enfants qui présentent un trouble dans le spectre de l'autisme (Hughes & Russell, 1993; Ozonoff, Pennington, & Rogers, 1991; Robinson, Goddard, Dritschel, Wisley, & Howlin, 2009) ou un trouble de déficit de l'attention avec hyperactivité (voir méta-analyse de Pauli-Pott & Becker, 2011).

À la lumière de ces constats, les deux articles de la thèse ont exploré les interactions entre les comportements maternels et deux contextes de vulnérabilité, soit le désavantage socioéconomique et un tempérament difficile, dans la prédiction des FE à l'âge préscolaire.

Inspirée par la Théorie de la susceptibilité différentielle (TSD) (Belsky, 1997; 2005), la thèse teste l'hypothèse plus générale selon laquelle les enfants qui sont plus vulnérables, tant au plan environnemental qu'individuel, seraient davantage affectés par des comportements parentaux négatifs et par l'absence de comportements positifs, mais bénéficieraient davantage des comportements positifs et de l'absence de comportements négatifs au regard du développement des FE. Autrement dit, les enfants vulnérables exposés à des comportements hostiles et négligents sont ceux dont le développement serait le plus compromis, tandis que ces mêmes enfants sont présumés devenir plus performants que leurs pairs favorisés, lorsqu'exposés à des comportements parentaux de haute qualité (Belsky & Pluess, 2009; Boyce & Ellis, 2005).

La thèse révèle dans un premier temps que la performance des enfants de 36 mois aux tâches de FE-conflit et FE-inhibition est positivement et significativement associée à un statut socioéconomique (SSE) plus élevé. Ces résultats sont cohérents avec les récentes études qui confirment que le SSE est un prédicteur robuste du développement des FE (pour une recension d'écrit, voir Carlson, Zelazo, & Faja, sous presse). Des liens directs ont été trouvés entre certains domaines de sensibilité maternelle et la performance aux tâches de FE-conflit et FE-inhibition, mais le patron de résultats diffère d'un article à l'autre. Les résultats du premier article révèlent des liens directs entre tous les domaines de sensibilité maternelle et la performance aux tâches de FE-conflit, à l'exception du domaine « Teaching orientation », et une absence de relation entre ces mêmes domaines et les FE-inhibition. Quant au deuxième article, plusieurs liens directs sont observés avec les FE-inhibition (Table 2, article 2), mais aucun avec les FE-Conflit. Cette incohérence dans les résultats est difficile à expliquer, autrement que par le fait que les deux échantillons, sans être indépendants, diffèrent par leur

taille. Il y a donc plusieurs participants communs aux deux échantillons, mais un certain nombre se retrouvent uniquement dans l'un ou dans l'autre. Les liens directs trouvés entre les domaines de sensibilité maternelle et les FE-conflit et l'absence de relations directes avec les FE-inhibition avec un plus grand nombre de participants (article 1) sont cohérents avec d'autres études utilisant le même échantillon. En effet, ce patron de résultats a été trouvé avec le score global de sensibilité maternelle et les FE mesurées à 18, 26 et 36 mois (Bernier, Carlson, & Whipple, 2010; Bernier, Carlson, Deschênes, & Matte-Gagné).

Concernant les hypothèses principales des deux articles, des interactions significatives ont été principalement observées au regard des FE-inhibition. La quasi-absence d'interaction entre le SSE et les comportements maternels dans la prédiction des FE-conflit suggère que les liens entre les domaines de sensibilité maternelle et les FE-conflit ne varient pas ou peu selon le SSE. Quant à l'absence d'interaction entre les domaines de sensibilité maternelle et un tempérament difficile chez l'enfant en lien avec la performance aux FE-conflit, celles-ci seraient probablement dues à la nature des comportements maternels considérés. À l'inverse, les interactions significatives constatées dans la prédiction des FE-inhibition portent à croire que : 1) des comportements maternels de qualité agissent, comme pour d'autres aspects du développement de l'enfant, comme facteurs de protection dans un environnement désavantagé sur le plan socioéconomique; 2) que les enfants ayant un tempérament difficile sont ceux qui sont le plus affectés par de faibles niveaux de comportements qui supportent la régulation émotionnelle et la présence de comportements hostiles et négligents, mais, en contre- partie, sont ceux qui bénéficient le plus de hauts niveaux de comportements positifs et de faibles niveaux de comportements négatifs.

## **Apport original de la thèse et intégration des résultats**

L'originalité de la thèse réside principalement dans l'approche privilégiée et les variables considérées dans la prédiction des FE à l'âge préscolaire. La prise en compte des effets interactifs gagne de plus en plus en popularité dans les études qui se penchent sur les mécanismes développementaux associés aux FE (Conway & Stifter, 2012; Raver, Blair, & Willoughby, 2013; Ursache, Blair, Stifter, & Voegtline, 2013) mais aucune à ce jour ne s'est penchée sur les variables à l'étude dans les deux articles. De plus, avoir opté pour une approche multidimensionnelle des FE de même que des comportements maternels favorise une compréhension de plus en plus précise de la contribution des facteurs individuels et environnementaux dans le développement des FE (Conway & Stifter, 2012).

Tel que souligné par Zelazo et Carlson (2012), la distinction entre les FE qui sollicitent les systèmes motivationnels et affectifs (*hot EF*, semblables au FE-inhibition) et les FE qui ne sollicitent pas, ou moins, ces systèmes (*cool EF* semblables aux FE-conflit), est bien appuyée par les études cliniques sur des patients ayant des lésions cérébrales et par la recherche en neuroimagerie auprès de populations adolescentes et adultes, mais davantage de recherche est nécessaire pour mieux comprendre l'émergence de ces fonctions durant l'enfance. En ce sens, les résultats de la thèse contribuent à documenter la pertinence de considérer les deux dimensions séparément dans l'étude du développement des FE et suggèrent que la nature des relations (directes et modérées) entre les comportements maternels et les FE est différente selon la dimension de FE considérée.

En tenant compte des différentes relations déjà trouvées entre certains types de comportements maternels et plus particulièrement le score global de sensibilité maternelle et les FE (Bernier et al., 2010; 2012; Matte-Gagné & Bernier, 2012), la thèse a misé sur les

domaines du Tri de cartes de sensibilité maternelle dans le but de couvrir un plus grand éventail de comportements et de raffiner l'analyse des liens entre les variables à l'étude. De plus, cet instrument de mesure, en plus de ses qualités psychométriques établies, permettait de considérer le degré de comportements négatifs et positifs plutôt que de mesurer uniquement l'absence ou la présence de ceux-ci. Les résultats des deux articles appuient en partie la pertinence de l'approche privilégiée au regard des comportements maternels. Cette approche a permis de déceler les effets d'interactions entre certains domaines spécifiques de sensibilité maternelle et le SSE au regard des deux domaines de FE. Quant aux résultats du deuxième article, ceux-ci contribuent à documenter l'importance des comportements qui supportent la régulation émotionnelle en bas âge chez les enfants pour qui, par prédisposition tempéramentale, la régulation des émotions négatives est déjà un défi, et ce, particulièrement au regard des FE-inhibition. D'une part, la nature essentiellement similaire des domaines de comportements maternels qui interagissent avec les deux facteurs de vulnérabilité suggère que l'objectif initial de couvrir un plus large éventail de comportements maternels, plutôt que d'utiliser le score global de sensibilité maternelle, n'est pas réellement atteint. Les résultats suggèrent plutôt qu'une réelle approche multidimensionnelle des comportements maternels devrait inclure des mesures spécifiques de comportements de différentes natures, telles que des mesures de soutien à l'autonomie (Whipple, Bernier, & Mageau, 2011) et de soutien à la régulation de l'attention (Conway & Stifter, 2012). D'autre part, sans prétendre à des résultats indépendants, la réplification des résultats d'un domaine à l'autre tend à confirmer la robustesse du phénomène.

Hughes, Roman, Hart, et Ensor (2013) soulignent que la littérature a maintes fois démontré l'impact de contextes de grande vulnérabilité, souvent caractérisés par l'abus et la

négligence, sur le développement cognitif, mais on en sait très peu sur les impacts de l'exposition à un risque plus modéré. Étant donné les caractéristiques de l'échantillon de la première étude, les résultats contribuent à l'avancement des connaissances dans cet univers de risque « normatif », défini ici par le relatif désavantage socioéconomique.

Finalement, complémentaires aux résultats de la seule autre étude à s'être penchée sur l'interaction entre les comportements parentaux et le tempérament de l'enfant dans la prédiction des FE à l'âge préscolaire (Conway & Stifter, 2012), les résultats du deuxième article contribuent à documenter de manière plus précise comment les liens (directs et modérés) entre les comportements maternels et les deux dimensions de FE peuvent varier selon la nature des comportements maternels considérés.

Dans un souci d'intégration des résultats, il est important de souligner ici que les variables impliquées dans les interactions significatives observées dans les deux articles ont comme point commun d'être en lien avec la régulation émotionnelle. Concernant le SSE, il est largement démontré que les enfants qui se développent dans un environnement désavantagé sur le plan socioéconomique vivent davantage de stress, et que cette surexposition a des conséquences néfastes et permanentes sur les systèmes de régulation du stress (Repetti, Taylor, & Seeman, 2002). De plus, les enfants ayant un tempérament difficile ressentent davantage d'émotions négatives et ont plus de difficulté à gérer celles-ci et finalement, les comportements maternels offrent un support externe à la régulation émotionnelle (dans le cas de comportements positifs) ou nuisent à celle-ci (dans le cas de comportements négatifs). Il n'est donc pas surprenant de trouver des relations entre ces variables et la performance à la tâche de FE-inhibition, qui sollicite principalement les habiletés de régulation des émotions.

Malgré un apport original et significatif à la littérature sur le développement des FE, les deux articles de la thèse présentent un certain nombre de limites qui appellent à la prudence dans l'interprétation des résultats, et mettent en évidence la nécessité de répliquer ceux-ci et de poursuivre la recherche dans le domaine.

### **Limites**

Certaines limites de la thèse sont communes aux deux articles, tandis que d'autres sont spécifiques à l'un ou à l'autre, étant donné les variables considérées dans chaque étude. La première limite à considérer est la taille modeste de l'échantillon du deuxième article. Cette taille a pour effet de diminuer la puissance statistique et ainsi limiter notre capacité à déceler des effets d'interaction (qui sont particulièrement sujets à des erreurs de Type II) et la portée des résultats. De plus, l'utilisation d'un devis corrélationnel empêche d'inférer des liens causaux entre les variables à l'étude.

Les statistiques descriptives des deux articles de thèse associées aux tâches de FE mettent en lumière certaines limites. Premièrement, les scores aux tâches du DCCS et du délai de gratification montrent une faible variabilité, ce qui suggère que plusieurs enfants obtiennent le score maximal ou près du maximum, ce qui a probablement limité davantage la puissance statistique. Le fait de mesurer les FE-inhibition à partir d'une tâche seulement, a probablement contribué à cette faible variabilité. Il aurait donc été préférable d'inclure plus d'une tâche qui mesurent ces FE avec différents niveaux de difficulté (Kochanska et al., 2009), telles que les tâches où les enfants doivent choisir entre une petite récompense tout de suite ou une plus grande récompense plus tard, ou une tâche de délai de gratification où les enfants doivent attendre plus longtemps pour obtenir une récompense. Par ailleurs, le fait

d'avoir tout de même trouvé des résultats significatifs suggère que le phénomène est assez important pour être détecté malgré une faible variation dans les scores observés à ces tâches.

La mesure unique des comportements maternels lorsque les enfants avaient 12 mois constitue également une limite de la thèse. Étant donné que les comportements maternels ne sont pas mesurés de manière concurrente à 36 mois, il est possible qu'une partie des liens constatés entre les comportements maternels à 12 mois et les FE à 36 mois soient en fait attribuables aux comportements maternels au même âge. Il aurait donc été pertinent de mesurer les comportements maternels concurremment aux FE, ce qui aurait permis de différencier l'apport des comportements maternels en bas âge de ceux mesurés concurremment. De plus, considérant que de plus en plus d'études trouvent que les comportements maternels et paternels contribuent différemment au développement de fonctions similaires aux FE ou au développement de troubles en lien avec les FE (Belsky, Hsieh, & Crnic, 1998; Kochanska, Askan & Joy, 2007), le fait de seulement tenir compte des comportements maternels est une limite de la thèse. Considérer l'apport des interactions père-enfant dans les deux articles aurait permis d'explorer les possibles rôles complémentaire (Paquette, 2004) et compensateur (Martin, Ryan, & Brooks-Gunn, 2007; Simons & Conger, 2007) des comportements paternels dans le développement des FE. Il serait également fort intéressant et pertinent d'examiner si les comportements paternels contribuent de la même façon au développement des deux domaines de FE, et s'ils interagissent également avec les facteurs de vulnérabilité considérés dans les deux articles.

Finalement, le fait de mesurer le tempérament par un questionnaire rempli par la mère peut être considéré à la fois comme une force et une limite du deuxième article de la thèse. D'une part, cette méthode de mesure du tempérament permet de mesurer un large éventail des



caractéristiques émotionnelles et comportementales de l'enfant et de présumer une meilleure validité écologique. En effet, en étant rapportés par la mère, les comportements rapportés sont basés sur un beaucoup plus grand nombre d'observations et par conséquent plus représentatifs du tempérament de l'enfant au quotidien qu'une mesure observationnelle en laboratoire. Par ailleurs, cette mesure est moins objective qu'une mesure observationnelle (Rothbart, & Hwang, 2002). L'idéal aurait été de combiner les deux méthodes de mesure (Karp, Serbin, Stack, & Schwartzman, 2004). Une dernière limite en lien avec la mesure du tempérament est le fait qu'il soit mesuré à 15 mois. Généralement, le tempérament est mesuré dans les premiers mois de la vie afin de mesurer les caractéristiques purement propres à l'enfant, qui n'ont pas été influencées par l'environnement. Il serait important de répliquer les résultats du deuxième article en mesurant le tempérament plus tôt dans le développement de l'enfant, et, tel qu'énoncé précédemment, jumelé à des mesures observationnelles du tempérament.

Nonobstant les limites à prendre en compte dans l'interprétation des résultats de la thèse, celle-ci comporte des implications intéressantes tant au plan scientifique que pour le domaine de l'intervention.

### **Implications pour la recherche, le domaine de l'intervention et pistes de recherche futures**

Il est important de mentionner ici que d'autres études supportent indirectement l'hypothèse selon laquelle les comportements maternels joueraient un rôle primordial dans le développement des FE. En effet, des études ont trouvé des liens entre les comportements parentaux et des construits voisins des FE, tels la métacognition (Moss, Parent, Gosselin, & Dumont, 1993), l'auto-régulation (ex., Jennings et al., 2008), la planification, l'attention et la mémoire (Gauvain, 2001; NICHD ECCRN, 2005), la régulation comportementale (Clark,

Woodward, Horwood, & Moor, 2008) ou la capacité de l'enfant à produire un effort volontaire contrôlé (Eisenberg et al., 2010; Kochanska, Murray, & Harlan, 2000; Poehlmann et al., 2010). À la lumière de ces résultats, il est possible de constater qu'il existe une nomenclature diversifiée pour identifier des construits similaires aux FE. Davantage de recherche est non seulement nécessaire afin d'identifier quels types de comportements maternels contribuent à quels aspects des fonctions exécutives, mais aussi pour différencier quels concepts reflètent la mesure d'un même construit de ceux qui sont fondamentalement différents.

Sur le base des récentes études inspirée de la TSD qui identifient la réactivité physiologique et certains gènes précis comme facteurs de vulnérabilité qui interagissent avec la qualité des comportements parentaux dans la prédiction d'autres aspects du développement de l'enfant (Bakermans-Kranenburg & Van IJzendoorn, 2011; Klein, Velderman, Bakermans-Kranenburg, Juffer, & Van IJzendoorn, 2006; Kochanska, Kim, Barry, & Philibert, 2011), il est possible d'émettre l'hypothèse que les mêmes effets de modération seraient constatés au regard du développement des deux dimensions de FE. Par ailleurs, étant donné que le tempérament difficile est considéré comme la manifestation comportementale d'une vulnérabilité génétique (Ellis, Boyce, Belsky, Bakermans-Kranenburg, & Van IJzendoorn, 2011), davantage de recherche est nécessaire afin de déterminer si les modérateurs ont des effets indépendants, ou si les résultats du deuxième article sont le reflet d'un même phénomène mesuré différemment.

Une récente étude d'Ursache et al. (2013) constate des résultats comparables à ceux du deuxième article, mais sous un angle différent. Les résultats de cette étude suggèrent que les enfants qui performant le mieux à des tâches de FE à 4 ans sont ceux qui démontrent les plus hauts niveaux de réactivité émotionnelle, mais aussi les meilleures habiletés d'autorégulation à

15 mois, alors que les enfants qui performant le moins bien aux tâches de FE sont ceux qui démontrent également des hauts niveaux de réactivité émotionnelle, mais de faibles capacités d'autorégulation. Dans ce cas-ci, le facteur de protection et/ou aggravant est en lien avec les habiletés de régulation interne de l'enfant, tandis dans le cas du deuxième article de la thèse, le facteur de protection prend la forme de la régulation externe procurée ou non par les comportements maternels. Il serait donc pertinent de poursuivre la recherche afin de vérifier si les liens trouvés dans le cadre des deux articles changent en cours de développement. Il est possible d'émettre l'hypothèse qu'après un certain âge, l'importance des comportements maternels qui procurent une régulation externe diminue à mesure que l'enfant acquiert la capacité de s'autoréguler. Tel que mentionné précédemment, il serait également important de mesurer les comportements maternels et paternels plus d'une fois dans le temps, afin d'être en mesure de 1) cerner l'apport de chaque parent au regard du développement des fonctions exécutive et 2) déterminer si l'apport de certains comportements maternels et paternels est plus déterminant à un âge qu'un autre.

Enfin, en mettant de l'avant l'étude de l'influence des comportements maternels dans le développement des FE, la thèse vise ultimement à identifier des facteurs environnementaux proximaux à l'enfant sur lesquels il est possible d'agir dans le but de favoriser un développement sain des FE. Dans ce contexte, considérer les effets d'interaction visait à raffiner l'analyse et identifier les enfants à qui il serait important de porter une attention particulière dans les programmes d'intervention précoce. En lien avec cette idée et dans la foulée des travaux basés sur les postulats de la TSD, des études montrent que des enfants vulnérables sur le plan génétique profitent davantage des effets bénéfiques des interventions au regard des comportements extériorisés et de la sécurité d'attachement (Bakermans-

Kranenburg, Van IJzendoorn, Pijlman, Mesman, & Juffer (2008); Klein et al., 2006). L'effet protecteur des comportements maternels que suggèrent les résultats de la thèse au regard du développement des FE s'inscrit en cohérence avec les programmes d'intervention existants qui ciblent les interactions mères-enfants comme mécanisme clé pour influencer positivement le développement des enfants. Ces approches d'intervention sont appuyées par des données méta-analytiques qui montrent que de brèves interventions comportementales se montrent efficaces dans l'amélioration des compétences maternelles et que promouvoir des comportements parentaux sensibles et de haute qualité est faisable et réaliste. Les résultats du premier article suggèrent que cette approche serait bénéfique pour les enfants en général (relations avec les FE-conflit), et plus particulièrement qu'elle aiderait à protéger les enfants des conséquences négatives associées au désavantage socioéconomique (relations avec les FE-inhibition). Quant aux résultats du deuxième article, ils attirent l'attention sur l'importance de promouvoir des comportements maternels qui supportent la régulation émotionnelle chez les enfants considérés comme difficiles par leur mère, surtout dans le cadre des programmes d'intervention précoce qui vise le développement cognitif. Ce constat est d'autant plus important étant donné les résultats obtenus, auprès de 3148 mères et 953 pères, dans le deuxième cycle de l'étude populationnelle sur la violence familiale dans la vie des enfants du Québec (Clément, Chamberland, Côté, Dubeau, & Beauvais, 2005), qui suggèrent que les mères qui perçoivent leur enfant comme difficile ont davantage tendance à utiliser des comportements à caractère violent. Elles seraient donc particulièrement susceptibles de pouvoir bénéficier d'interventions préventives qui, à la lumière des résultats du deuxième article de la thèse, seraient particulièrement bénéfique pour leurs enfants, vu leur tempérament plus difficile. Globalement, les résultats de la thèse confirme la pertinence de miser sur la

qualité de la relation parent-enfant comme véhicule pour favoriser un sain développement de l'enfant.

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## ANNEXE 1

### *Tri de cartes de comportements maternels*



**M = Maman B =Bébé**

1. M remarque les sourires et les vocalises de B
2. M n'est pas consciente ou elle est insensible aux manifestations de détresse émises par B.
3. M interprète selon ses propres désirs et ses états d'âme les signaux de B.
4. Les réponses sont tellement lentes à venir que B ne peut pas faire le lien entre ce qu'il fait et la réponse de M.
5. M remarque lorsque B est en détresse, pleure, chigne ou gémit.
6. Considérant les réponses de B, les comportements vigoureux et stimulants de M sont appropriés.
7. M. répond seulement aux signaux fréquents, prolongés et intenses émis par B.
8. Les réponses de M aux efforts de communication de B sont imprévisibles et incohérentes.
9. M répond de façon cohérente aux signaux de B.
10. M « accueille ou salue » B lorsqu'elle revient dans la pièce.
11. M est quelquefois consciente des signaux de détresse de B, mais elle les ignore ou encore elle n'y répond pas immédiatement.
12. D'après les réactions de B, M interprète correctement les signaux émis par ce dernier.
13. M est irritée par les demandes de B (notez les informations provenant de l'interview avec M à propos des demandes de soins qu'exige B).
14. M réprimande B.

15. M est consciente de la façon dont ses humeurs affectent B.
16. M coupe souvent les activités appropriées de B.
17. M a peur de gâter B, elle possède des valeurs rigides sur la façon de prendre soin de B.,
18. M organise l'environnement en tenant compte de ses besoins et de ceux de B
19. M perçoit les comportements négatifs de B comme des manifestations de rejet, elle le prend « personnellement ».
20. M semble contrariée par les demandes d'attention et les signes de détresse de B.
21. M est fière de son B.
22. Même lorsque M a des sentiments négatifs à l'égard de B, elle peut passer outre lorsqu'elle interagit avec lui.
23. M respecte B à titre d'individu, c'est-à-dire qu'elle accepte que B n'agisse pas selon son idéal.
24. M connaît bien son enfant; elle est une bonne source d'information.
26. M est négative lorsqu'elle décrit B.
27. M adopte une attitude abattue dans ses tâches maternelles.
28. M taquine B au-delà de ce que B paraît apprécier.
29. Lors des interactions, M attend la réponse de B.
30. M joue à « cou-cou » et d'autres jeux semblables avec B.
31. M fait l'effort d'emmener B dans des activités extérieures comme le magasinage et la visite d'amis :

32. M donne des jouets qui correspondent à l'âge de B.
33. M crée un environnement stimulant autour de B.
34. M recherche les contacts face à face avec B.
35. M montre du doigt et nomme les choses intéressantes dans l'environnement de B.
36. M adopte généralement une attitude positive à l'égard de B.
37. Les commentaires de M à propos de B sont généralement positifs.
38. M touche B de façon affectueuse.
39. Quand M prend B dans ses bras, elle le cajole souvent.
40. M fait des compliments à B.
41. M interagit sans émotion avec B.
42. M est animée dans ses contacts avec B.
43. M exprime son affection surtout en embrassant B sur la tête
44. Lors du changement de couche, M tient compte des activités de B.
45. Lors des repas, M encourage les initiatives de B.
46. Lors des repas, M signale ses intentions et attend une réponse de B.
47. Lors des repas, M tient compte des activités de B.
48. M donne des collations et des repas nutritifs à B.
49. L'environnement de B est sécuritaire.
50. M intervient de façon appropriée lorsque B peut se salir ou mettre le désordre.
51. M est embarrassée lorsque B se salit pendant qu'il se nourrit et parfois cela devient nuisible à l'alimentation.

- 52.** M n'interrompt pas toujours les activités de B qui pourraient être dangereuses.
- 53.** Les interactions avec B se terminent bien – l'interaction se termine lorsqu'il est satisfait (considérez également la fin d'une interaction agréable pour B).
- 54.** Les interactions se déroulent en accord avec la cadence et l'état de B.
- 55.** M tente souvent la stratégie « essaie et erreur » lorsqu'elle cherche une façon de satisfaire les besoins de B.
- 57.** M accable B de stimulations constantes et déphasées.
- 58.** M est consciente des changements d'humeur chez B.
- 59.** En interaction avec B, M est rude et intrusive.
- 60.** Lorsque B éprouve de l'inconfort, M trouve rapidement et correctement la source du problème.
- 61.** M semble porter attention à B même lorsqu'il est dans une autre pièce.
- 62.** M est préoccupée par une entrevue – elle semble ignorer B.
- 63.** M est malhabile dans la répartition de son attention pour B et pour d'autres tâches, elle manque ainsi certains signaux de B.
- 64.** M répond immédiatement aux cris et aux plaintes de B.
- 65.** M supervise B et répond à ses besoins même lorsqu'elle est occupée à d'autres activités comme la cuisine ou la conversation avec un visiteur.
- 66.** M organise ses déplacement de manière à percevoir les signaux de B.

67. Lorsque M est dans la même pièce que B, elle est accessible sans restriction.
68. M paraît souvent « dans les nuages » et ne remarque pas les demandes d'attention ou d'inconfort de B.
69. M semble dépassée, dépressive.
70. M ignore souvent (ne répond pas) les signaux positifs et affectueux de B.
71. Quand B est de mauvaise humeur, M le place souvent dans une autre pièce de manière à ne plus être dérangée.
72. À première vue, la maisonnée ne semble pas indiquer la présence d'un enfant
73. Le contenu et la cadence des interactions avec B semblent déterminés par M plutôt que par les réponses de B.
74. Pendant les interactions face à face, M manque souvent les signaux de B indiquant de ralentir le rythme ou la cadence des échanges ou d'arrêter l'interaction.
75. M tente d'intéresser B à des jeux ou à des activités qui dépassent nettement ses capacités.
76. M peut interrompre une interaction en cours pour parler à un visiteur ou pour entreprendre une autre activité qui lui traverse soudainement l'esprit.
77. M installe souvent B devant la télévision afin de le divertir.

**78.** Les siestes sont organisées selon les besoins de M plutôt que selon les besoins immédiats de B : « Quand c'est le temps de la sieste, je le couche, qu'il soit fatigué ou pas »

**79.** M répète des mots lentement à B, elle nomme fréquemment des objets ou des activités comme si elle désirait les lui enseigner.

**80.** M parle très rarement directement à B.

**81.** M utilise souvent le parc pour B de façon à ce qu'elle puisse assumer ses autres tâches domestiques.

**82.** M se sent à l'aise de laisser B aux soins d'une gardienne durant la soirée.

**83.** M sort de la pièce où se trouve B sans aucune forme « d'explication » ou de « signal » (ex., « Je reviens dans deux minutes »).

**84.** M semble souvent traiter B comme un objet inanimé lorsqu'elle le déplace ou ajuste sa posture.

**85.** M est très réticente à laisser B à qui que ce soit, sauf au conjoint ou à des proches.

**86.** M encourage les interactions de B avec les visiteurs. Elle peut les inviter à prendre B ou elle peut le présenter aux visiteurs (ex., « regarde qui est là! »)

**87.** M semble bizarre ou mal à l'aise lorsqu'elle interagit face à face avec B.

**88.** M semble souvent oublier la présence de B lorsqu'elle est en interaction avec un visiteur.

**89.** M est très attentive lorsque les couches sont souillées, elle semble les changer aussitôt que cela est nécessaire.

**90.** M met souvent les jouets et autres objets à la portée de B de façon à attirer son attention.

## ANNEXE 2

### *Description des domaines de sensibilité maternelle*



**Domaine 1** : *Interactions sociales et réponses aux signaux positifs*

1. M remarque les sourires et les vocalises de B
6. Considérant les réponses de B, les comportements vigoureux et stimulants de M sont appropriés.
10. M « accueille ou salue » B lorsqu'elle revient dans la pièce.
22. Même lorsque M a des sentiments négatifs à l'égard de B, elle peut passer outre lorsqu'elle interagit avec lui.
30. M joue à « cou-cou » et d'autres jeux semblables avec B.
41. M interagit sans émotion avec B.
42. M est animée dans ses contacts avec B.
53. Les interactions avec B se terminent bien – l'interaction se termine lorsqu'il est satisfait (considérez également la fin d'une interaction agréable pour B).
57. M accable B de stimulations constantes et déphasées.
70. M ignore souvent (ne répond pas) les signaux positifs et affectueux de B.
80. M parle très rarement directement à B.
87. M semble bizarre ou mal à l'aise lorsqu'elle interagit face à face avec B.

**Domaine 2** : *Réponses aux affects négatifs et à la détresse*

2. M n'est pas consciente ou elle est insensible aux manifestations de détresse émises par B.
5. M remarque lorsque B est en détresse, pleure, chigne ou gémit.

11. M est quelquefois consciente des signaux de détresse de B, mais elle les ignore ou encore elle n'y répond pas immédiatement.

60. Lorsque B éprouve de l'inconfort, M trouve rapidement et correctement la source du problème.

64. M répond immédiatement aux cris et aux plaintes de B.

68. M paraît souvent « dans les nuages » et ne remarque pas les demandes d'attention ou d'inconfort de B.

71. Quand B est de mauvaise humeur, M le place souvent dans une autre pièce de manière à ne plus être dérangée.

### **Domaine 3** : *Partage d'affects positifs*

21. M est fière de son B.

27. M adopte une attitude abattue dans ses tâches maternelles.

36. M adopte généralement une attitude positive à l'égard de B.

37. Les commentaires de M à propos de B sont généralement positifs.

40. M fait des compliments à B.

69. M semble dépassée, dépressive.

### **Domaine 4** : *Hostilité et rejet*

13. M est irritée par les demandes de B (notez les informations provenant de l'interview avec M à propos des demandes de soins qu'exige B).

14. M réprimande B.

16. M coupe souvent les activités appropriées de B.
19. M perçoit les comportements négatifs de B comme des manifestations de rejet, elle le prend « personnellement ».
20. M semble contrariée par les demandes d'attention et les signes de détresse de B.
23. M respecte B à titre d'individu, c'est-à-dire qu'elle accepte que B n'agisse pas selon son idéal.
26. M est négative lorsqu'elle décrit B.
59. En interaction avec B, M est rude et intrusive.

**Domaine 5** : *Sensibilité et vigilance*

3. M interprète selon ses propres désirs et ses états d'âme les signaux de B.
4. Les réponses sont tellement lentes à venir que B ne peut pas faire le lien entre ce qu'il fait et la réponse de M.
7. M. répond seulement aux signaux fréquents, prolongés et intenses émis par B.
8. Les réponses de M aux efforts de communication de B sont imprévisibles et incohérentes.
9. M répond de façon cohérente aux signaux de B.
12. D'après les réactions de B, M interprète correctement les signaux émis par ce dernier.
15. M est consciente de la façon dont ses humeurs affectent B.
24. M connaît bien son enfant; elle est une bonne source d'information.

- 28.** M taquine B au-delà de ce que B paraît apprécier.
- 29.** Lors des interactions, M attend la réponse de B.
- 44.** Lors du changement de couche, M tient compte des activités de B.
- 52.** M n'interrompt pas toujours les activités de B qui pourraient être dangereuses.
- 54.** Les interactions se déroulent en accord avec la cadence et l'état de B.
- 55.** M tente souvent la stratégie « essaie et erreur » lorsqu'elle cherche une façon de satisfaire les besoins de B.
- 58.** M est consciente des changements d'humeur chez B.
- 61.** M semble porter attention à B même lorsqu'il est dans une autre pièce.
- 62.** M est préoccupée par une entrevue – elle semble ignorer B.
- 65.** M supervise B et répond à ses besoins même lorsqu'elle est occupée à d'autres activités comme la cuisine ou la conversation avec un visiteur.
- 63.** M est malhabile dans la répartition de son attention pour B et pour d'autres tâches, elle manque ainsi certains signaux de B.
- 66.** M organise ses déplacements de manière à percevoir les signaux de B.
- 73.** Le contenu et la cadence des interactions avec B semblent déterminés par M plutôt que par les réponses de B.
- 74.** Pendant les interactions face à face, M manque souvent les signaux de B indiquant de ralentir le rythme ou la cadence des échanges ou d'arrêter l'interaction.

**75.** M tente d'intéresser B à des jeux ou à des activités qui dépassent nettement ses capacités.

**78.** Les siestes sont organisées selon les besoins de M plutôt que selon les besoins immédiats de B : « Quand c'est le temps de la sieste, je le couche, qu'il soit fatigué ou pas »

**88.** M semble souvent oublier la présence de B lorsqu'elle est en interaction avec un visiteur.

**83.** M sort de la pièce où se trouve B sans aucune forme « d'explication » ou de « signal » (ex., « Je reviens dans deux minutes »).

**89.** M est très attentive lorsque les couches sont souillées, elle semble les changer aussitôt que cela est nécessaire.

### **Domaine 6**: *Enseignement et orientation*

**32.** M donne des jouets qui correspondent à l'âge de B.

**33.** M crée un environnement stimulant autour de B.

**35.** M montre du doigt et nomme les choses intéressantes dans l'environnement de B.

**45.** Lors des repas, M encourage les initiatives de B.

**79.** M répète des mots lentement à B, elle nomme fréquemment des objets ou des activités comme si elle désirait les lui enseigner.

**82.** M se sent à l'aise de laisser B aux soins d'une gardienne durant la soirée.

**85.** M est très réticente à laisser B à qui que ce soit, sauf au conjoint ou à des proches.

**86.** M encourage les interactions de B avec les visiteurs. Elle peut les inviter à prendre B ou elle peut le présenter aux visiteurs (ex., « regarde qui est là! »)

**90.** M met souvent les jouets et autres objets à la portée de B de façon à attirer son attention.

### **Domaine 7 : *Contacts physique et proximité***

**34.** M recherche les contacts face à face avec B.

**38.** M touche B de façon affectueuse.

**39.** Quand M prend B dans ses bras, elle le cajole souvent.

**67.** Lorsque M est dans la même pièce que B, elle est accessible sans restriction.

**77.** M installe souvent B devant la télévision afin de le divertir.

**81.** M utilise souvent le parc pour B de façon à ce qu'elle puisse assumer ses autres tâches domestiques.

**84.** M semble souvent traiter B comme un objet inanimé lorsqu'elle le déplace ou ajuste sa posture







ANNEXE 3

*Questionnaire sur le tempérament de l'enfant*

## CARACTÉRISTIQUES DE VOTRE ENFANT

**Directives:** Pour chacun des énoncés suivants, encerclez le numéro qui décrit le mieux VOTRE enfant. Le terme "dans la moyenne" fait référence à ce que vous jugez que l'enfant moyen obtiendrait sur ces énoncés, et correspond au #4 dans l'échelle.

	Très facile		Dans la moyenne			Difficile	
1. Jusqu'à quel point est-il facile ou difficile pour vous de consoler votre enfant lorsqu'il/elle est en détresse?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. Jusqu'à quel point est-il facile ou difficile pour vous de prédire les moments où votre enfant va s'endormir ou se réveiller?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. Jusqu'à quel point est-il facile ou difficile pour vous de prédire les moments où votre enfant aura faim?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. Jusqu'à quel point est-il facile ou difficile pour vous de savoir ce qui dérange votre enfant lorsqu'il/elle pleure ou est "chigneux"?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	Jamais	1-2 fois	3-4 fois	5-6 fois	7-9 fois	10-14 fois	Plus de 15
5. Combien de fois par jour votre enfant devient-il irritable, "chigneux" ou difficile (sans considérer la durée)?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	Beaucoup moins		Autant			Beaucoup plus	
6. De façon générale, jusqu'à quel point est-ce que votre enfant pleure et chigne en comparaison avec l'enfant moyen?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	Réagit bien très souvent	Réagit bien une fois sur deux					Ne réagit pas bien souvent
7. Habituellement, comment votre enfant réagit-il à de nouveaux jeux?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. Habituellement, comment votre enfant réagit-il/elle à de nouveaux aliments qu'on lui présente?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	Réagit bien très souvent	Réagit bien une fois sur deux					Ne réagit pas bien souvent
9. Habituellement, de quelle façon votre enfant réagit-il/elle envers une nouvelle personne?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. Habituellement, de quelle façon votre enfant réagit-il/elle lorsqu'il/elle se retrouve dans un nouvel endroit?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	Aime toujours	Aime une fois sur deux					N'aime jamais
11. Avec le temps, votre enfant s'adapte-t-il/elle aux nouvelles personnes, aux nouveaux endroits, aux événements ou autres choses auxquelles il/elle fait face?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	Pas facilement	Dans la moyenne					Facilement
12. Jusqu'à quel point est-il facile pour votre enfant de se fâcher, d'être irrité ou attristé?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	Peu intense	Dans la moyenne					Très intense

13. Quand votre enfant se fâche, est irrité ou est triste à cause de quelque chose, quelle est l'intensité de ses pleurs, de ses cris ou de sa mauvaise humeur?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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	Très bien	Dans la moyenne					N'aime pas ça du tout
14. De quelle façon votre enfant réagit-il/elle lorsque vous l'habillez?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	Pas très actif-ve	Dans la moyenne					Très actif-ve
15. En général, votre enfant est-il/elle actif-ve?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	Plus que la moyenne	Dans la moyenne					Moins que la moyenne
16. Jusqu'à quel point votre enfant fait-il/elle des sourires et des bruits heureux?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	Très bonne	Dans la moyenne					Sérieux
17. De façon générale, quelle est l'humeur de votre enfant?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	Aime beaucoup	Dans la moyenne					N'aime pas du tout
18. Jusqu'à quel point votre enfant aime jouer avec vous?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	Veut être libre souvent	Parfois oui parfois non					Veut très souvent être pris
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19. Jusqu'à quel point votre enfant cherche à être dans vos bras?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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	Très bien ne le dérange pas	Dans la moyenne					Pas bien, cela le dérange
20. De quelle façon votre enfant réagit-il/elle lorsqu'il y a un changement ou un chambardement dans votre routine habituelle, par exemple si vous allez chez quelqu'un ou au magasin?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	Varie peu	Dans la moyenne				Change souvent et rapidement	
21. Dans quelle mesure l'humeur de votre enfant est-elle variable?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	Très excité	Dans la moyenne				Pas du tout excité	
22. Jusqu'à quel point votre enfant devient-il/elle excité-e lorsque quelqu'un joue avec lui/elle ou lui parle?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	Très peu	Dans la moyenne				Beaucoup	
23. Outre les soins de base (donner à manger, changer la couche, etc.), votre enfant vous demande-t-il/elle beaucoup d'attention?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	Presque toujours	Une fois sur deux				Presque jamais	
24. Lorsqu'il/elle est laissé-e seul-e, votre enfant réussit-il/elle à jouer par lui/elle-même?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	Aime ça	Se plaint parfois					Déteste ça
25. De quelle façon votre enfant réagit-il/elle lorsque vous devez l'installer dans un siège d'auto, une chaise haute ou un parc?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	Presque toujours	Parfois					N'aime pas se coller
26. Jusqu'à quel point votre enfant se colle-t-il/elle contre vous lorsque vous le/la prenez dans vos bras?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	Facile et amusant	Moyen et chigne parfois					Difficile dérange beaucoup
27. Dans quelle mesure est-il difficile d'amener votre enfant à des endroits à l'extérieur de la maison?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	Jamais ou rarement	Parfois oui parfois non					Toujours
28. Est-ce que votre enfant continue à jouer avec des objets malgré le fait que vous lui avez dit de ne pas y toucher?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
29. Est-ce que votre enfant continue son chemin même si vous lui avez dit de ne pas aller à cet endroit ou de venir vous voir?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
30. Est-ce que votre enfant se fâche lorsque vous le retirez d'un endroit où il ne devrait pas être ou d'un jeu qu'il ne devrait pas faire?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	Peu ou pas du tout	Essaie, persiste un peu					Très persistant
31. Lorsque vous êtes occupée, dans quelle mesure votre enfant est-il persistant à essayer d'avoir votre attention?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	Très facile	Moyen					Très difficile
32. Veuillez évaluer le niveau général de difficulté que représenterait votre enfant pour une mère moyenne.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7