

# The Influence of Parental Reflective Functioning on Children's Attachment Security at Age 7

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## INTRODUCTION

Maternal Reflective Functioning (RF) has been shown to play a role in the intergenerational transmission of attachment security. Good maternal ability to understand her own and infant mental states is associated with infants' secure attachment quality in early childhood (Slade, Grienenberger, Bernbach, Levy, & Locker, 2005). To date little focus has been given to the influence of paternal RF on child attachment. Additionally, the effects in mothers have so far been examined only when children were approximately 14 months old (e.g. Slade et al., 2005).



## AIMS OF THE STUDY

Objective of this study was to examine both paternal (RF<sub>F</sub>) and maternal RF (RF<sub>M</sub>) and to focus on their influence on attachment representation in middle childhood.

We expected parental RF to predict attachment security at age 7. Furthermore it was hypothesized that maternal RF has a greater influence on children's attachment security than paternal RF.

## MATERIAL & METHODS

In a non-clinical subsample of  $N = 20$  mothers and  $N = 15$  fathers of an ongoing longitudinal study parental reflective functioning was assessed using the short version of the Parent Development Interview (PDI, Slade, Aber; Berger, Bresgi, & Kaplan, 2012). The PDI was coded using the Addendum to Reflective Functioning Scoring Manual (Slade et al., 2005).

Reflective Functioning and children's attachment status were both assessed at the same test time. Children were of age 6 to 8 ( $M = 7.61$  years,  $SD = 0.50$ ). The story stem GEV-B (Gloger-Tippelt & König, 2009) was used to assess children's attachment representation.

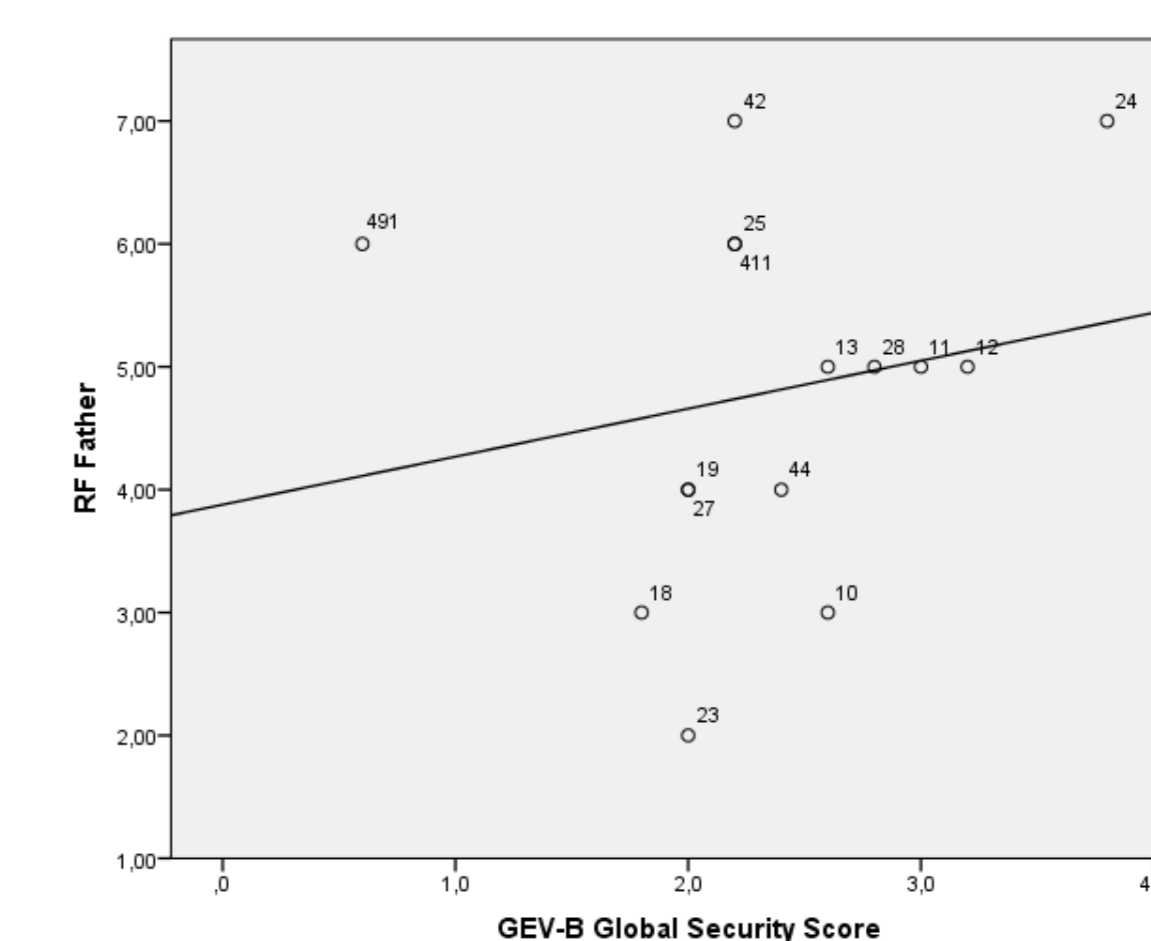
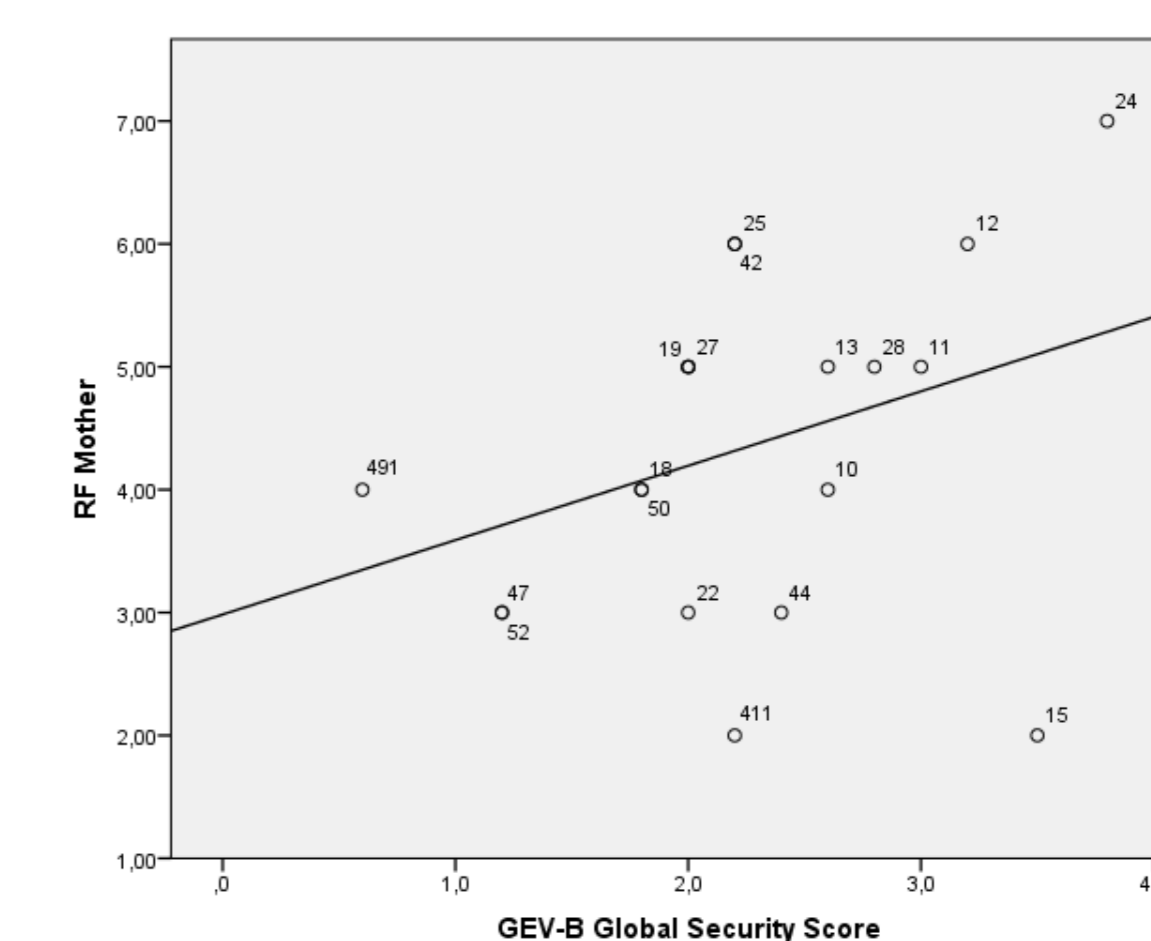
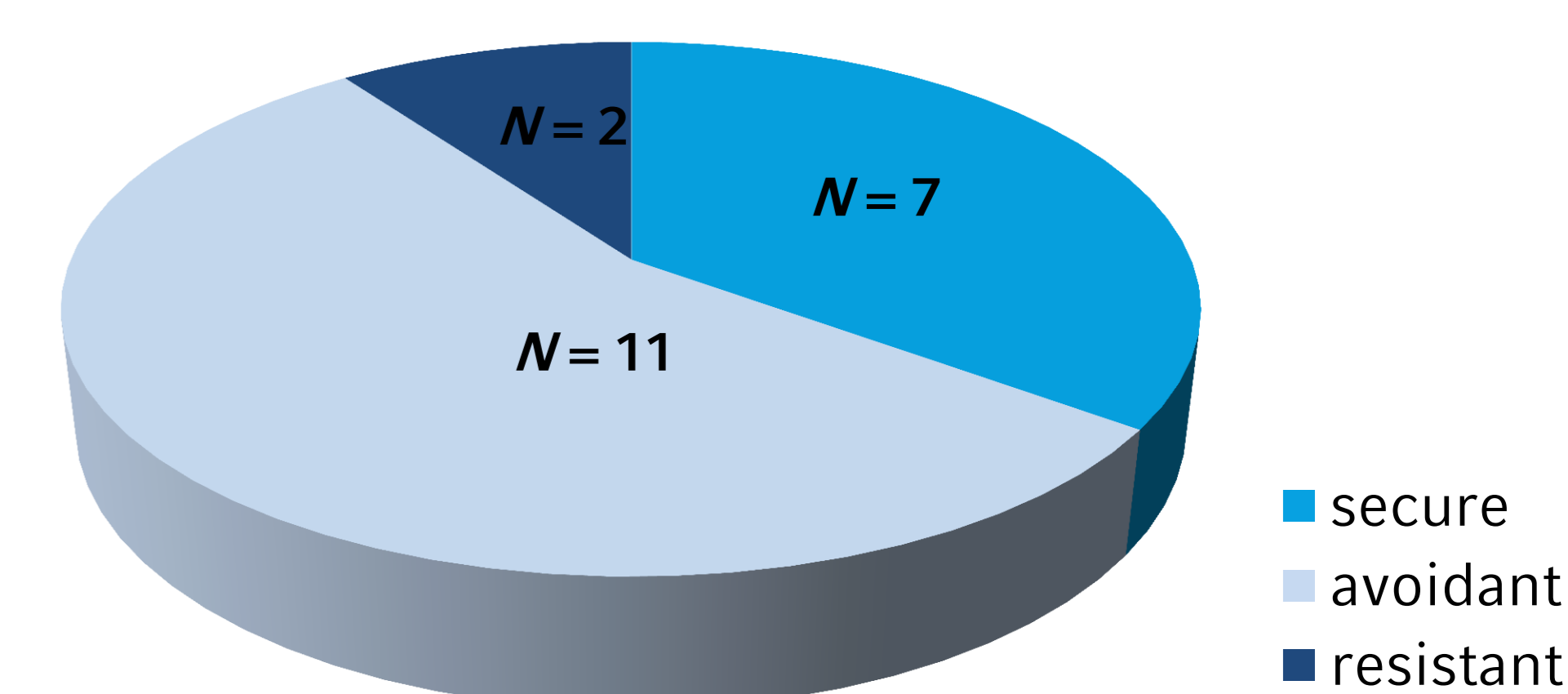
## RESULTS

Graphics show the distribution of children's attachment representations, positive correlations between RF<sub>M</sub> and RF<sub>F</sub> each with attachment representation. The table shows results for a U-Test. In a multiple linear regression maternal RF accounted for  $R^2 = 0.21$  ( $\beta = 0.46$ ,  $p = 0.09$ ) of the variance in children's attachment. Paternal RF did not account for additional variance. The final model containing the variables maternal RF ( $\beta = 0.25$ ,  $p = 0.49$ ), paternal RF ( $\beta = -0.06$ ,  $p = 0.84$ ) and an interaction of maternal and paternal RF ( $\beta = 0.34$ ,  $p = 0.40$ ) accounts in total for  $R^2 = 0.26$  of the variance in infant attachment.

	Secure			Insecure			U-Test	
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	U	P
RF <sub>M</sub>	7	5.00	1.83	13	4.00	1.00	25.50	0.057
RF <sub>F</sub>	6	5.67	1.21	9	4.22	1.39	12.00	0.045*

\*  $p < 0.05$  one-way

Distribution: Children's Attachment Representations



## CONCLUSIONS

RF is positively correlated with children's attachment security at age 6 to 8. Maternal RF predicted children's attachment representation. The best prediction of children's attachment is if both, maternal and paternal RF are included in one model. As predicted, maternal RF has a greater influence on infant attachment than paternal RF. Due to small sample size, results should be interpreted with caution.

Further research has to be done to determine whether the effects are consistent in a larger sample.