

The Discrepancy Between Sensitivity Beliefs and Sensitive Parenting Behaviors of Ethnic Majority and Ethnic Minority Mothers

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The aim of this study was to test the relation between sensitivity beliefs and sensitive behaviors in Dutch ethnic majority and Turkish ethnic minority mothers. Sixty mothers, 30 in the Dutch and 30 in the Turkish group, with a child between the ages of 2 and 5 years participated. Sensitivity belief scores were derived by correlating the Maternal Behaviour Q-Sort (Pederson, Moran, & Bento, 1999), the expert-derived profile of the highly sensitive mother, with mothers' beliefs about the ideal mother. For observed sensitive behaviors, mothers and children were observed in a free play situation with the Emotional Availability Scales (Biringen, 2008). Dutch mothers scored higher on sensitivity beliefs and sensitive behaviors than Turkish mothers, and this relation between ethnicity and sensitivity (beliefs and behaviors) was not mediated by socioeconomic status (SES). Sensitivity beliefs were not related to sensitive behaviors in either group, and ethnicity and SES did not moderate this association. Further investigation of the relation between sensitivity beliefs and sensitive behaviors could inform interventions on how to translate improved parenting beliefs into improvements in parenting practices.

Keywords: maternal sensitivity, beliefs, behavior, ethnic minority, socioeconomic status

Parenting beliefs refer to cognitive content regarding the way that children should be raised that are held to be true (often used interchangeably with parenting attitudes). These beliefs in turn are thought to shape an individual's parenting behavior; that is, observable parent–child interaction patterns (Coplan, Hastings, Lagacé-Séguin, & Moulton, 2002; Kiang, Moreno, & Robinson, 2004; Kiang, Moreno, & Robinson, 2004; Sigel & McGillicuddy-De Lisi, 2002). In studies on early childhood, sensitive parenting, the ability to adapt one's behavior to the signals and needs of the child, is studied widely across different cultures as an important aspect of parent–child interactions that predict positive child development (e.g., Bakermans-Kranenburg, van IJzendoorn, & Juffer, 2003; Bernier, Carlson, & Whipple, 2010; Eisenberg et al., 2001; Mesman, van IJzendoorn, & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2012). It is interesting that, whereas ethnic minorities have been found to show lower levels of observed sensitive parenting than ethnic majority mothers (Mesman et al., 2012), there is also evidence that beliefs about sensitive parenting converge between groups of mothers from different ethnic backgrounds (Emmen, Malda, Mesman, Ekmekci, & van IJzendoorn, 2012). This suggests that the relation between beliefs and behaviors regarding sensitive parenting may be different depending on ethnicity. The goal of the current study is to examine the relation between sensitivity

beliefs and sensitive behaviors in Dutch ethnic majority and Turkish ethnic minority mothers.

One of the parenting domains that is particularly important in early childhood is sensitive responsiveness, which refers to a parent's ability to perceive child signals, to interpret these signals correctly, and to respond to them promptly and appropriately by adapting their own behaviors to the child's needs (Ainsworth, Bell, & Stayton, 1974). Sensitive parenting thus requires following the child's lead and also implies not interfering with the child's ongoing activities unnecessarily, a skill that becomes more important during toddlerhood when children develop increasing physical and psychological autonomy from the parent (Moss et al., 2014). This ability to refrain from interfering is also known as nonintrusiveness; for example as used in the Emotional Availability scales, which also include a sensitivity scale (e.g., Biringen, Derscheid, Vliegen, Closson, & Easterbrooks, 2014). Thus, similar to sensitivity, nonintrusiveness requires insight into the child's needs and motives, and both are important elements of early childhood parenting that foster positive child development (Bakermans-Kranenburg et al., 2003; Bernier et al., 2010; Eisenberg et al., 2001; Tamis-LeMonda, Bornstein, & Baumwell, 2001).

Surprisingly, the relation between beliefs about sensitive parenting and actual observed sensitive parenting have rarely been studied. One study described intervention effects on maternal attitudes toward sensitivity and actual maternal sensitive behavior in a sample of mothers with children between 1 and 3 years old with high scores on externalizing problem behavior (Van Zeijl et al., 2006). It is interesting to note that the intervention resulted in more sensitive attitudes, as well as more sensitive behaviors, but that no correlation between maternal attitudes and maternal behaviors was found. In another study, expectant mothers' negative

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maternal attitudes about parenting and child rearing in general predicted lower sensitivity toward their children at the age of 12 to 15 months (Kiang et al., 2004). Thus, the relation between sensitivity beliefs and behaviors requires further investigation to understand why and when this relation might be absent or present. One particularly interesting issue in this investigation is the role of ethnicity.

Several studies have shown that beliefs regarding several domains of parenting differ between ethnic groups (e.g., Harwood, Schoelmerich, Ventura-Cook, Schulze, & Wilson, 1996; Jambunathan, Burts, & Pierce, 2000; Phalet & Schonpflug, 2001). It is interesting, however, that parenting beliefs about the importance of sensitivity for optimal parenting have been found to converge strongly between ethnic minority and majority mothers in the Netherlands (Emmen, Malda, Mesman, Ekmekci, & van IJzendoorn, 2012), as well as between mothers from 15 countries and ethnic groups across the globe (Mesman, *in press*). In contrast to the cross-cultural agreement on the importance of sensitive parenting, ethnic minority mothers generally have been found to behave less sensitively when compared with majority mothers (Mesman et al., 2012). The reason for this discrepancy is unclear. It may be that sensitivity beliefs are more difficult to put into practice under more stressful circumstances. Given that ethnic minorities often experience more socioeconomic pressures, acculturation stress, and family disadvantage such as single and teenage parenthood (Mather, 2010; Mesman et al., 2012; Platt, 2007), the translation of positive sensitivity beliefs into actual sensitive parenting may be compromised in this group. In other words, ethnicity may moderate the relation between sensitivity beliefs and behaviors.

One important variable to examine when studying the role of ethnicity in parenting beliefs and behaviors is socioeconomic status (SES) for several reasons. First, SES is often confounded with ethnicity, especially when examining ethnic minority versus ethnic majority families (Barnard & Turner, 2011; Mesman et al., 2012). Migration history, language difficulties, acculturation, and discrimination are some of the processes that explain the generally low SES of ethnic minority versus ethnic majority families (Berry, 1997). Second, variations in SES are known to be related to variations in parenting beliefs and behaviors (e.g., Bornstein, Hahn, Suwalsky, & Haynes, 2003; Mistry, Biesanz, Chien, Howes, & Benner, 2008; Tekin, 2008). The Family Stress Model posits that socioeconomic pressures such as low income lead to parental stress, which in turn leads to less positive parenting (Conger & Donnellan, 2007). For ethnic minorities, this process may also include acculturation stressors, adding to the risk for maladaptive parenting (Emmen et al., 2013). Third, ethnic differences in parenting are often found to disappear or become significantly smaller when taking SES into account, a phenomenon also found specifically for sensitive parenting (Mesman et al., 2012). In sum, SES always needs to be taken into account when examining ethnicity and parenting. Given that low SES is associated with higher stress levels, SES may also act as a moderator in the relation between sensitivity beliefs and sensitive parenting, as it may be more difficult to translate positive beliefs into positive behaviors under stressful circumstances.

The goal of the current study is to examine the relation between sensitivity beliefs and actual sensitive and nonintrusive parenting behaviors in ethnic minority and ethnic majority mothers. In the

current study we focus on Dutch majority and Turkish second-generation minority mothers of young children in the Netherlands. The Turkish group represents the largest ethnic minority group in the Netherlands (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek (CBS), 2012). The Turkish immigrants first came to the Netherlands as invited guest workers in the period 1960–1970. Regarding sensitivity beliefs one study showed that both majority Dutch and minority Turkish mothers showed strong convergence in their beliefs about sensitive parenting as an important part of optimal parenting (Emmen et al., 2012). In another study however, Turkish minority mothers reported lower endorsement of child-centered parenting behaviors than Dutch majority mothers (Durgel, Van de Vijver, & Yagmurlu, 2013). Regarding sensitive parenting, Turkish minority mothers have been found to show lower levels of sensitivity (Leseman & De Jong, 1998; Yaman, Mesman, van IJzendoorn, Bakermans-Kranenburg, & Linting, 2010), and more parenting practices related to intrusiveness, such as obedience-oriented parenting and controlling behaviors (Nijsten, 2006).

Three main hypotheses were tested. First, we expected ethnic minority status to be related to lower sensitivity beliefs (i.e., less endorsement of sensitivity as part of optimal parenting), and that this relation would be mediated by SES. Second, we expected a significant positive association between mothers' sensitivity beliefs and observed sensitivity and nonintrusiveness. Third, we expected ethnicity and SES to moderate the relation between sensitivity beliefs and actual sensitive parenting, in that the relation is less strong in ethnic minority and lower-SES mothers (i.e., reflecting more difficulties translating sensitivity beliefs into sensitive behaviors).

Method

Sample and Procedure

The sample consisted of 30 Turkish minority mothers and 30 Dutch majority mothers in the Netherlands. The Turkish minority and Dutch majority groups of mothers differed significantly regarding mean age of the mothers and the target children (Table 1).

The Turkish minority sample was recruited in the context of a parenting intervention randomized controlled trial (RCT) study (Yagmur, Mesman, Malda, Bakermans-Kranenburg, & Ekmekci, 2014), based on their children's high levels of externalizing problems as measured by the Child Behaviour Checklist (CBCL/1[1/2]-5, Achenbach & Rescorla, 2000). These mothers participated in the control group of the intervention study in which they received six phone calls and were invited to talk about their child's development without receiving any advice or information. At least three months after completion of the intervention study, we informed all 35 mothers in the control group about the present study and asked them to participate. Of these mothers, 30 agreed and completed the assessments.

All Turkish minority mothers were born in the Netherlands (with at least one of their parents born in Turkey). The Dutch majority sample was recruited in the context of a large longitudinal study on mothers' and fathers' parenting in relation to young siblings' behavioral development (Hallers-Haalboom et al., 2014). Of the 32 Dutch mothers who were approached, 30 agreed to participate. Descriptive statistics of the main variables of the Dutch and Turkish-Dutch group are presented in Table 1. The Dutch

Table 1
Means (SDs) and Ethnic Group Differences for Mothers

Variable	Dutch			Turkish-Dutch			<i>t</i>	Eta squared
	<i>N</i>	Range	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>N</i>	Range	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)		
Family income	30	2–7	6.10 (1.27)	28	3–7	5.39 (1.24)	–2.06*	.07
Educational level	30	2–5	3.40 (.81)	30	1–5	3.23 (.94)	–.74	—
Age target child	30	2–4	2.83 (.99)	30	2–5	3.47 (.73)	2.83**	.12
Age mother	30	30–48	35.60 (4.53)	30	23–39	31.30 (3.53)	–4.10**	.22
Number of children	30	2–3	2.07 (.25)	30	1–3	1.77 (.63)	–2.43*	.09
Externalizing problem behavior	30	3–46	20.65 (11.22)	30	4–36	19.77 (9.04)	–.34	—
Sensitivity beliefs	30	.61–.82	.74 (.06)	30	.57–.83	.71 (.07)	–2.27*	.07
Observed maternal sensitivity	30	18–29	25.10 (2.50)	30	12–29	22.23 (3.77)	–3.48**	.17
Observed maternal non-intrusiveness	30	13–26	21.10 (3.59)	30	10–24	18.57 (3.81)	–2.65*	.11

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

mothers for the current study were selected to resemble the Turkish minority sample as closely as possible with regard to maternal educational level, gender of the focus child, and the level of this child's externalizing problem behavior as measured by the CBCL/1[1/2]-5 (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2000).

All Turkish minority and Dutch majority mothers gave written consent and were visited at home by a trained undergraduate or graduate student. The home visits took approximately 1.5 hr and were conducted in Dutch, unless the mother indicated to prefer Turkish. No measures used in the original studies from which the samples were derived could have influenced participants' views of the ideal mother.

Measures

Sensitivity beliefs. To assess maternal beliefs about sensitivity, the Maternal Behaviour Q-Sort (MBQS; Pederson, Moran, & Bento, 1999), version 3.1, was used. The MBQS consists of 90 cards with statements about maternal behaviors that mothers and professionals sorted into 9 stacks from "least descriptive" (1) to "most descriptive" (9) of the ideal mother. The MBQS was originally designed for home observations of maternal interactions with infants, but has also been used to assess maternal beliefs about sensitivity (Emmen et al., 2012), following the example of Posada et al. (1995) who used the Attachment Q-sort to assess maternal beliefs. Because the original items were designed to be evaluated by professionals rather than mothers, the behavioral descriptions were simplified for the present study to make them more understandable for (low educated) mothers and to extend the items beyond infancy (B for baby in the original items). For example, the item "Provides B with little opportunity to contribute to the interaction" was simplified into "Gives her child little opportunity to play along or to respond." The participants were first asked to sort the cards into 3 stacks: "do not fit the ideal mother at all," "do not fit nor do fit the ideal mother," and "fit the ideal mother really well." The participants were explicitly told that there are no correct or wrong answers and that it is not about their own parenting behavior, but about what the ideal mother should or should not do. Any question participants had concerning the meaning of an item was answered according to the item explanations in the protocol. When the participants distributed the cards across the three stacks, they were asked to sort each stack into 3 smaller stacks. After the participants distributed all cards across nine

stacks, they were asked to evenly distribute the cards across the stacks until each stack consisted of 10 cards (as described in Emmen et al., 2012).

Sensitivity belief scores were derived by correlating the resulting profiles with the criterion sort provided by the authors of the MBQS (Pederson et al., 1999). This means that sensitivity belief scores can potentially range from –1.00 to 1.00, with higher positive scores reflecting high concordance with the criterion sort that represents the highly sensitive mother. *z*-scores were computed to detect outliers (*z*-scores lower than –3.29 or higher than 3.29) within ethnic groups. One outlying score was found within the Turkish minority group on sensitivity belief scores and was winsorized for use in the analyses (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001).

Maternal sensitivity and nonintrusiveness. Maternal sensitivity and nonintrusiveness were measured in a 10-min unstructured free-play episode with toys brought by the assistant. During this episode, mother and child were free to play with all toys, and mothers were instructed to play with their child the way they would normally do.

Mother–child interactions were coded using the Sensitivity and Nonintrusiveness scales of the 4th Edition of the Emotional Availability Scales (EA Scales; Biringen, 2008). Each scale consists of seven subscales, the first two with scores ranging from 1–7 and the other five with scores ranging from 1–3, with higher scores referring to higher levels of sensitivity or nonintrusiveness (total potential score range for each scale 7–29; Biringen, 2008). *Sensitivity* refers to appropriate responding to the child's signals combined with positive affect. This scale consisted of the following subscales: affect toward child; clarity of perceptions and appropriate responsiveness; awareness of timing; flexibility, variety and creativity in modes of play or interaction with parent; acceptance in speech; amount of interaction; conflict situation. *Nonintrusiveness* refers to following the child's lead and waiting for optimal breaks to enter interaction without interfering with the child's activities. This scale consisted of the following subscales: gives child space to explore and lead in play; noninterruptive ports of entry into interaction; commands, directives/verbal interferences; adult talking; didactic teaching; physical interferences; the adult is made to "feel" or "seem" intrusive. During the training of a team of (under-)graduate coders provided by the third author, who completed the online EA Scales-training and who is an experienced coder of parent–child interactions, three types of alterations were

made to prevent persistent interpretation problems. These alterations consisted of removing subjective criteria, adjustment of the criteria for some scores on subscales to make them more linear, and improvement of the independence of the separate dimensions by removing overlapping criteria (more information regarding the changes can be retrieved from the corresponding author). In addition, the subscale ‘the adult is made to ‘feel’ or ‘seem’ intrusive’ was removed from the nonintrusiveness scale because it referred to child behavior rather than parent behavior (leading to a potential score range of 6 to 26).

The videos of the Dutch mother and child dyads were coded by seven Dutch coders. Intercoder reliability on 60 cases from the total sample ranged from .73 to .92, with an average of .81 (intraclass correlation, single rater, absolute agreement). The videos of the Turkish minority mother and child dyads were coded by two coders from the Turkish minority group and one Dutch coder. The Dutch coder was assigned to mother-child dyads who communicated in Dutch, and also coded videos of dyads speaking Turkish that had been subtitled in Dutch (by bilingual research assistants). Intercoder reliability on 15 cases ranged from .73 to .96, with an average of .83 (intraclass correlation, single rater, absolute agreement).

Educational level and family income. Educational level was measured on a 5-point scale: *primary school* (1), *vocational school* (2), *secondary school/middle vocational education* (3), *high vocational education* (4) and *university or higher* (5). Annual gross family income was measured on a 7-point scale ranging from (1) “no income” to (7) “50.000 euro or more.” Education and income were included separately in the current study, because of the differential predictive value of these two constructs regarding parenting (Conger & Donnellan, 2007).

Results

T tests were conducted to test for significant differences between Dutch majority and Turkish minority mothers in socioeconomic background. The Dutch majority and Turkish minority mothers were similar in educational level, $t(58) = 0.74, p > .05$. Compared with the Dutch majority group the Turkish minority group had a lower family income, $t(58) = 2.06, p < .05, \eta_p = .07$.

As shown in Table 1, there was strong convergence between mothers’ views regarding the ideal mother and expert views about sensitive parenting in both the Dutch majority mothers and the

Turkish minority mothers, indicating that both groups strongly value sensitive parenting. A one-way between-groups analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted to compare views about sensitive parenting of Dutch majority and Turkish minority mothers while statistically controlling for the age of the target child. There was a significant difference between the Dutch majority and Turkish minority group on sensitivity belief scores $F(1,57) = 4.84, p = < .05, \eta_p = .08$. The views of Turkish minority mothers were significantly less similar to the MBQS criterion sort than those of Dutch majority mothers. Item analyses revealed significant ethnic differences on 22 out of 90 MBQS items. Because of the risk of Type I error, we only report the items with the strongest effects, that is, with *t*-values > 3.00 (Table 2).

Regarding sensitivity behaviors, the analyses showed that Dutch majority mothers scored significantly higher on observed sensitivity than Turkish minority mothers controlled for the age of the child, $F(1,57) = 10.47, p = < .05, \eta_p = .16$. Dutch majority mothers also scored significantly higher on observed nonintrusiveness than Turkish minority mothers controlled for the age of the child, $F(1,57) = 6.00, p = < .05, \eta_p = .10$.

We computed bivariate correlations between socioeconomic background variables and sensitivity beliefs, observed maternal sensitivity and observed maternal nonintrusiveness (Table 3). No significant correlations between socioeconomic background variables and sensitivity belief scores, observed maternal sensitivity, and observed maternal nonintrusiveness were found. Correlations were also examined for the Dutch majority and Turkish minority groups separately. Again, no significant correlations were found. Thus, we did not further test a mediation effect of sensitivity beliefs in the relation between SES and sensitive behaviors.

Bivariate correlations were computed to test the relation between sensitivity beliefs and sensitive behaviors. Post hoc power analyses showed that the power of the study was .78 to find a medium correlation of .30, however, bivariate correlations between maternal sensitivity beliefs and observed maternal sensitivity and nonintrusiveness were not significant for the total sample (Table 3). This was also the case for correlations between beliefs and behaviors within the two ethnic groups (Table 4). These correlations were also clearly not significantly different between the two groups (*p* values .58–.86), thus rejecting the hypothesis of moderation by ethnic group.

Table 2
Items With the Largest Differences Between Ethnic Groups

Item number and description	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)		<i>t</i> test (all <i>ps</i> > .01)
	Dutch	Turkish-Dutch	
Dutch higher than Turkish-Dutch			
30. Uses active physical manipulation	4.37 (1.43)	3.03 (1.73)	3.26
43. Animated with child	7.57 (1.00)	6.47 (1.61)	3.17
50. Creates interesting environment	6.97 (1.24)	5.90 (1.30)	3.25
72. Notices smiles and vocalizations	7.13 (.97)	6.03 (1.07)	4.17
81. Expresses positive feelings	8.90 (.31)	8.13 (.97)	4.12
Turkish-Dutch higher than Dutch			
11. Repeats words	6.37 (1.45)	7.47 (1.38)	3.01
12. Schedules naptimes	4.67 (1.42)	6.70 (2.14)	4.34
52. Uses verbal prohibitions	5.27 (1.44)	6.67 (2.01)	3.11

Table 3
Correlations Between Observed Parenting Variables, Parenting Beliefs Variables, and Background Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Observed sensitivity	—					
2. Observed nonintrusiveness	.67**	—				
3. Sensitivity belief score	.19	.12	—			
4. Income	.13	.17	.13	—		
5. Education	.12	.02	.22	.41**	—	
6. Age of the child	.17	.14	.06	.18	.11	—

Note. Range of n : 58–60.

** $p < .01$.

To test a potential moderator effect of socioeconomic factors on the relation between beliefs and behaviors, we conducted hierarchical multiple regression analyses with maternal education, family income, and sensitivity beliefs as predictors of observed sensitivity and observed nonintrusiveness, including two-way interactions between beliefs and maternal education and family income. In addition, we controlled for the age of the child in this analysis. All variables were centered to reduce multicollinearity, to simplify the interpretation of the main effects, and to compute the interaction terms. In the first step, age of the child was entered, in the second step maternal education and family income were entered, in the third step sensitivity beliefs were included, and in the fourth step the two interaction terms were added. None of the main effects or interaction effects were significant in any of the regression steps (p values .21–.80).

Discussion

Sensitivity beliefs and sensitive parenting behaviors were unrelated for the total sample and for both the Dutch majority and Turkish minority mothers. Dutch majority mothers had beliefs about the ideal mother that converged more with the expert-derived profile of the highly sensitive mother (i.e., MBQS) and showed higher levels of actual sensitive and nonintrusive behaviors in comparison with Turkish minority mothers. We did not find significant relations between SES and sensitivity beliefs and between SES and sensitive behaviors and therefore we did not test a mediation effect of sensitivity beliefs in the relation between SES and sensitive behaviors. The relation between sensitivity beliefs and sensitive behaviors was not moderated by ethnicity or SES.

Although earlier studies have shown a rather modest relation between attitudes and behaviors in parenting (Daggett, O'Brien, Zanolli, & Peyton, 2000; Kiang et al., 2004; Kochanska, Kuczynski, & Radke-Yarrow, 1989), a study focusing specifically on sensitivity showed no relation between attitudes and behaviors (Van Zeijl et al., 2006). In our study we also failed to find a relation between sensitivity beliefs and sensitive behaviors for Dutch majority mothers or for Turkish minority mothers. It seems that the extent to which a mother values sensitivity in child rearing does not necessarily translate into the extent to which she behaves sensitively.

A possible reason for not finding a relation between sensitivity beliefs and behaviors could be that sensitivity is generally not an aspect of parenting that is consciously applied. The neural basis of sensitive parenting has been found to reflect a complex interplay of

memory activation, self-regulation, recognizing others' emotions, and empathy (Musser, Kaiser-Laurent, & Ablow, 2012). This suggests that "automated" responses are at play, rooted in the caregiver's own childhood experiences (van IJzendoorn, 1995). Indeed, several aspects of sensitivity refer to intuitive rather than planned behaviors, such as smiling back when a child smiles, or imitating infant vocalizations (e.g., Braungart-Rieker, Garwood, Powers, & Wang, 2001).

In addition, sensitive parenting is very difficult to self-monitor, because self-monitoring requires recognition of the appropriateness of responses (see also Voorthuis et al., 2013, who did not find a relation between self-reported quality of care and observed sensitivity). Whereas a generally sensitive parent would be aware of a nonoptimal response to a child's cue (e.g., because of a competing demand, or tiredness), an insensitive parent will be unaware of the inappropriateness of a response, potentially leading to a mismatch between her beliefs and her behaviors. Thus, when it comes to sensitive parenting, it may be that only a sensitive parent has the ability to accurately translate sensitivity beliefs into sensitive behaviors. When it comes to the use of more concrete parenting practices such as punishment, it is likely that all types of parents can accurately assess and monitor whether or not they apply them, facilitating the relation between beliefs and behaviors.

The lack of a relation between beliefs and behaviors could also be related to the potential role of attachment representations of parents. Attachment representations refer to parents' mental representations of their relationship with their own parents. Individuals with a dismissive attachment representation show the following behaviors: insisting verbally on lack of memory for childhood, derogating attachment, limited thinking about attachment-related experiences and emotions, reporting unrealistic or idealized representations that are not coherent with experience (Pianta, Egeland, & Adam, 1996). Dismissive parents tend to have inflated views of their own (parenting) abilities (Pianta et al., 1996), which could lead to a discrepancy in beliefs and behaviors about parenting. Assessing attachment representations of parents together with their beliefs and behaviors in parenting could provide a more complete picture. Thus, the abstract nature of the sensitivity construct and the more intuitive nature of sensitive responding versus other aspects of parenting may be responsible for the lack of convergence between parental beliefs and behaviors regarding sensitivity.

Table 4
Correlations Between Observed Parenting Variables, Parenting Beliefs Variables, and Background Variables for Dutch Majority (Above Diagonal) and Turkish Minority (Below Diagonal) Mothers

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Observed sensitivity	—	.52**	.05	-.07	-.09	.11
2. Observed nonintrusiveness	.70**	—	-.05	.16	-.07	.01
3. Sensitivity belief score	.10	.10	—	-.28	.28	-.06
4. Income	.09	.02	.34	—	.26	.34
5. Education	.19	.03	.13	.51**	—	.39*
6. Age of the child	.09	.20	.08	-.24	-.36	—

Note. N for Dutch majority mothers: 30. Range of n Turkish minority mothers: 28–30.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

It also possible that the lack of a relation between sensitivity beliefs and sensitive behaviors is because of the observation setting. Observation time was rather short (about 10 min), and it may be that longer observational times would have yielded more accurate assessments of parents' sensitivity. In addition, sensitivity was observed during a free-play session that does not generally require responsiveness to child distress, thus hampering the opportunity to assess this important aspect of maternal sensitivity that is also clearly represented in the MBQS.

Sensitivity beliefs of Dutch majority and Turkish minority mothers correlated highly with the criterion sort, which means that mothers' views about ideal sensitivity converged with behavioral patterns that are considered indicative of sensitivity by the authors of the MBQS. Dutch majority and Turkish minority mothers scored high on sensitive behaviors too, indicating that they know how to react sensitively to child signals. Despite these general high scores on sensitivity beliefs and behaviors, Dutch majority mothers still scored higher on sensitivity beliefs, observed sensitivity, and observed nonintrusiveness than the Turkish minority mothers. The item analyses showed that this was mostly because of the Turkish minority mothers placing more emphasis on behaviors related to fostering obedience and less on affect compared with Dutch mothers. This is consistent with the collectivistic cultural origins of the Turkish group in which adherence to group norms are emphasized over individual wellbeing (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). However, this is not to say that fostering obedience cannot coexist with sensitivity. There is evidence that the interrelations between parenting dimensions may differ between cultural groups (e.g., Deater-Deckard et al., 2011; Manzi, Regalia, Pelucchi, & Fincham, 2012). Because we used a Q-sort measure to assess parenting beliefs, emphasis on one dimension of parenting necessarily detracts from emphasis on another parenting dimension, thus potentially underestimating the co-occurrence of dimensions. Furthermore, it is important to recognize that ethnic minority status does not only coincide with low SES, but also with a myriad of other risk factors that appear to be stronger predictors of less optimal parenting in this group than cultural factors (Mesman et al., 2012).

Contrary to findings in the current study, previous research has shown that SES plays a role in beliefs and behaviors in child rearing (e.g., Mistry et al., 2008; Tekin, 2008), and several studies have shown that differences in sensitivity or attachment security between majority and minority mothers disappear when controlling for SES (e.g., Chaudhuri, Easterbrooks, & Davis, 2009; Letourneau, Hungler, & Fisher, 2005; van IJzendoorn, 1990). We did not find any direct or moderation effects of family income and education. Although low family income is generally a stress factor, perhaps it only negatively affects family functioning when being below a certain threshold. The lowest family incomes in our sample were still in the middle income range and these families could therefore not be considered as poor. In addition, educational level of minority parents may be less indicative of their cognitive functioning (and associated parenting abilities) than in majority families. Even when minorities achieve high scores on a standardized exam, they have a higher chance of attaining low education levels compared with majorities with similarly high test scores (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2009). Similarly, in our study mothers in both groups were matched on education level, however, the income of Turkish minority families was still lower compared

with the income of Dutch majority families. In addition, minority status could be related to different kinds of stressors, such as acculturation processes (Berry, 1997).

Several limitations of this study should be noted. First, it was not possible to fully match participants on SES. Because earlier studies showed effects of SES on sensitivity beliefs and behaviors, full matching may have provided a better test of group differences. The samples used in this study were not normative in that Turkish children were selected for an intervention study based on high scores on child externalizing problems. However, only mothers from the control group condition were included here to prevent interference from the intervention and the groups did not differ on externalizing problem behaviors of the children. It is also important to note that we compared two groups with different cultural backgrounds within one country, which limits interpretations about the role of culture as a broader construct on parenting beliefs and behaviors. However, the advantage of comparing two ethnic groups within one country is that they are preparing their children for the same society, which means that differences between the groups in sensitivity beliefs are less likely to be because of differences in the broader societal context.

Furthermore, it is important to note that despite high scores of both groups on sensitivity beliefs and behaviors, the majority group still scored higher on sensitivity beliefs and behaviors compared with the ethnic minority group. Although distal SES-related stressors could be partly responsible for these findings (Conger & Donnellan, 2007; Mesman et al., 2012; Respler-Herman, Mowder, Yasik, & Shamah, 2012), more proximal stress processes may prove more informative in explaining ethnic differences in parenting beliefs and behaviors. These processes can include minority-specific stressors such as acculturation stress, language difficulties, and discrimination (Berry, 1997). The specific role of these different levels of stress on child rearing should be investigated in future studies. The attachment representations of parents could also be included to control for its influence on parenting beliefs and behaviors and their interrelations (Pianta et al., 1996). Furthermore, it would be important to examine potential differences between ethnic groups in how sensitivity relate to child outcomes, which was not measured in the current study. The literature suggests that sensitivity is related to positive child outcomes across ethnic groups (Mesman et al., 2012), but studies on sensitivity in ethnic minorities are still scarce and this issue requires further investigation. Finally, the sample size was very small and lower scores on observed sensitivity scores were underrepresented in the sample, which could both account for not finding a significant relation between beliefs and behaviors.

In conclusion, we did not find a relation between sensitivity beliefs and behaviors in the current study, as opposed to other studies showing meaningful relations between beliefs and behaviors for other parenting aspects. This may be because of the less concrete nature of sensitivity which makes it less easy for parents to consciously put their ideals about sensitivity behaviors into practice. Because of the particular importance of maternal sensitivity for child development, several interventions have been developed with the focus on enhancing maternal sensitivity, and have been successfully applied in various ethnic groups (e.g., Bjørknes & Manger, 2013; Reid, Webster-Stratton, & Beauchaine, 2001). To help parents, it is important to know what they want to achieve by assessing their ideals, and to conduct observations to uncover

actual sensitivity levels of parents, so that the gap between ideals and behaviors can be bridged by intervention.

Résumé

L'objectif de cette étude était de vérifier la relation entre les croyances sur la sensibilité et les comportements sensitifs chez des mères issues de la majorité ethnique néerlandaise et de la minorité ethnique turque. Les participantes étaient 60 mères, 30 d'origine néerlandaise et 30 d'origine turque, ayant un enfant âgé de 2 à 5 ans. Les notes pour les croyances sur la sensibilité ont été obtenues en corrélant les résultats du Maternal Behaviour Q-Sort (Pederson, Moran & Bento, 1999), profil de la mère très sensitive établi par des experts, et les croyances des mères au sujet de la mère idéale. Pour évaluer les comportements sensitifs, on a observé les mères et les enfants dans un contexte de jeu libre, au moyen des échelles Emotional Availability Scales (Biringen, 2008). Les mères néerlandaises ont obtenu des scores plus élevés que les mères turques pour les croyances sur la sensibilité et les comportements sensitifs. Cette relation entre ethnicité et sensibilité (croyances et comportements) n'a pas été modulée par la situation socioéconomique. Les croyances sur la sensibilité n'étaient pas reliées aux comportements sensitifs dans l'un ou l'autre groupe, et l'ethnicité et la situation socioéconomique ne modulaient pas cette association. D'autres analyses de la relation entre les croyances sur la sensibilité et les comportements sensitifs pourraient servir à établir des façons de traduire des croyances parentales améliorées en une amélioration des pratiques parentales.

Mots-clés : sensibilité maternelle, croyances, comportement, minorité ethnique, situation socioéconomique.

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