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Behavioral Approach and Fear Moderates the Relationship Between Insensitive/Intrusive Parenting and Early Language Development

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Introduction

- Early language development is implicated in a variety of critical developmental outcomes including social competence, school readiness, and self-regulatory capacities (Vallotton et al., 2011).
- Given such outcomes, researchers have examined factors influencing the development of early language abilities.
 - Positive parenting characteristics have been linked to the development of children's language (Tamis-LeMonda, 1996).
 - The behavioral inhibition system (BIS) and the behavioral activation system (BAS) have been linked to language usage (Schwartz et al., 1999).
- However, few studies have examined how these two factors interact to change the way early language develops, particularly in infancy.

Hypotheses

- Broadly, it was hypothesized that
 - The BIS, as indicated by infant fear, would be negatively associated with early language.
 - The BAS, as indicated by infant approach, would be positively associated with early language.
- Intrusive/insensitive parenting would be negatively related with early language.
- Additionally, it was hypothesized that stronger relations would be found between intrusive/insensitive parenting and early language for children high in fear and high in approach.

Method

Participants:

- Mother-infant dyads (n = 150) participated in a larger longitudinal study
- Mean age of mothers was 26.6 years
- Gender: 53% infants were males
- Demographics: 63% Caucasian, 11% Hispanic, 10% African-American, 15% Other
- 23.6% at or below poverty line

Procedure:

- Mothers completed the Revised Infant Behavioral Questionnaire (IBQ-R; Gartstein & Rothbart, 2003) at 4 months postpartum.
 - Two subscales, fear and approach, were used to assess BIS and BAS, respectively.
- At 8 months postpartum, mothers and infants engaged in an unstructured free play task without toys task.
 - This interaction was coded for 8 intrusive/insensitive maternal parenting behaviors (e.g., rigid or inconsistent parenting; ICC = 0.72) using the Parent-Child Early Relational Assessment (PCERA; Clark, 1985).

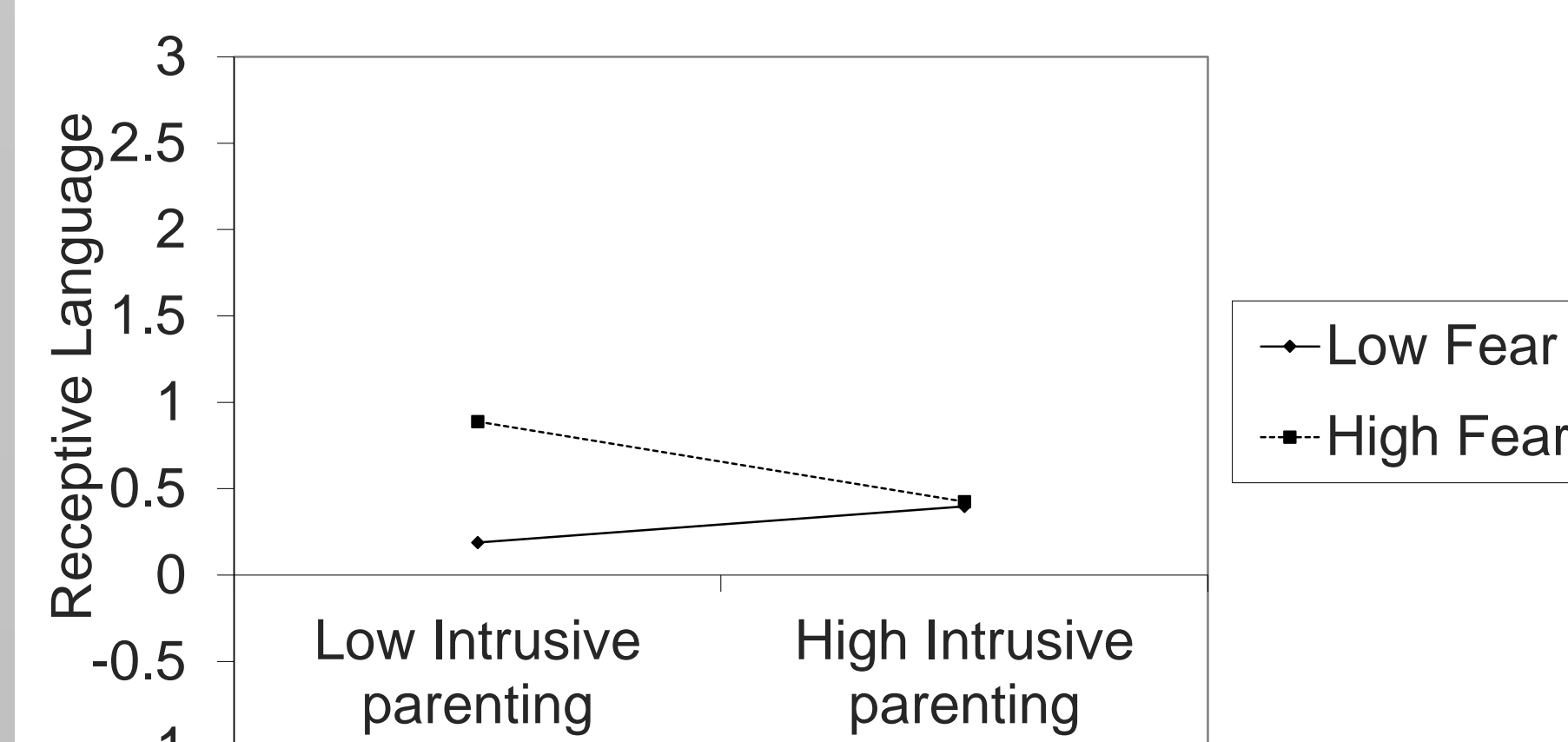
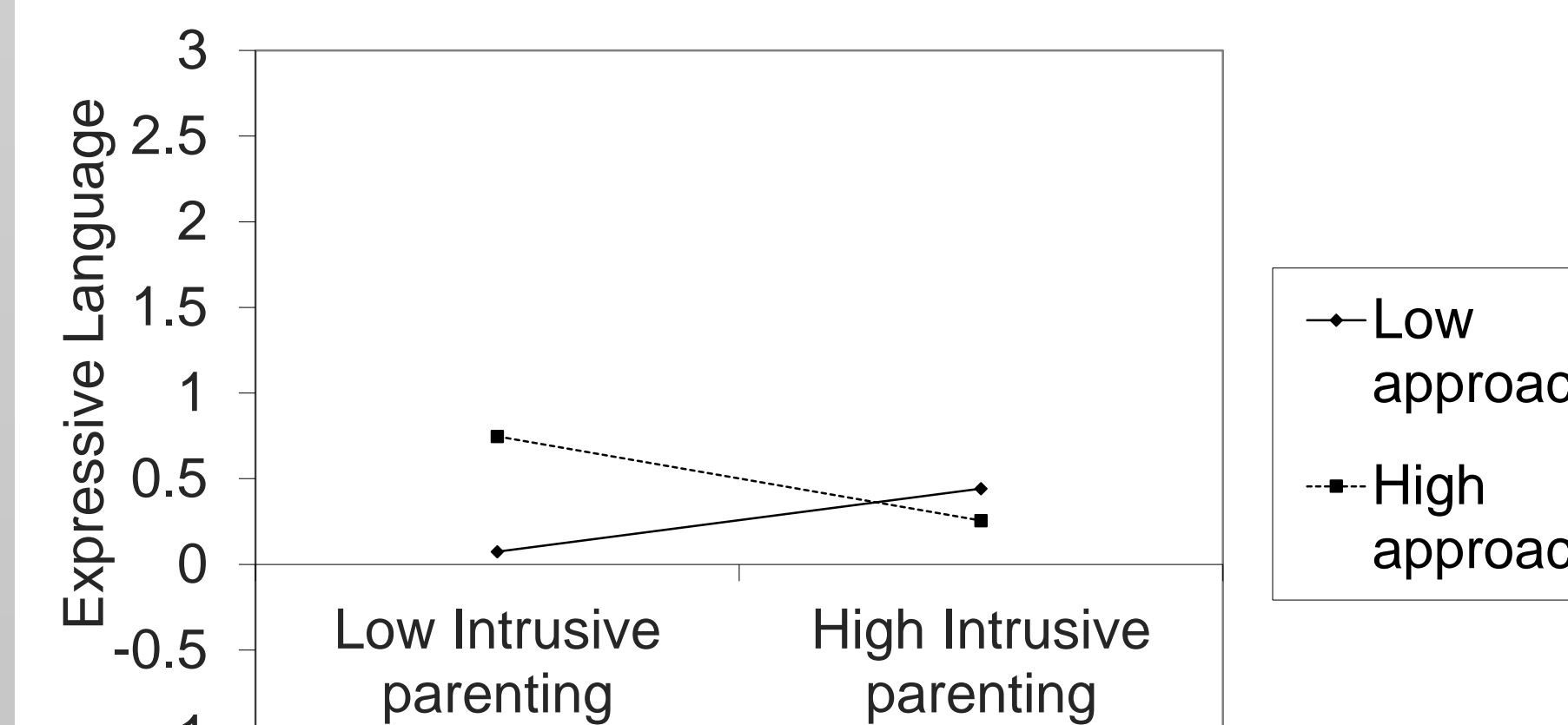
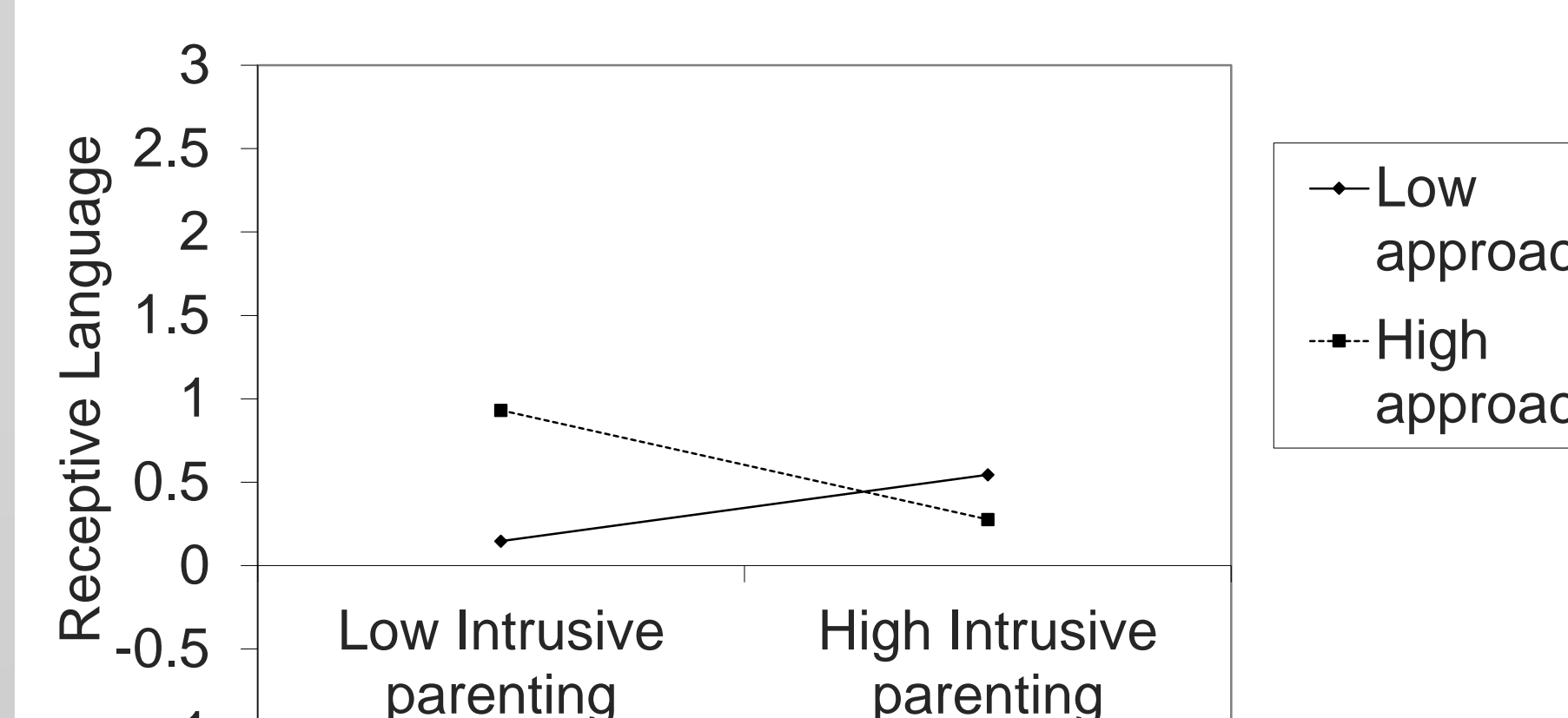
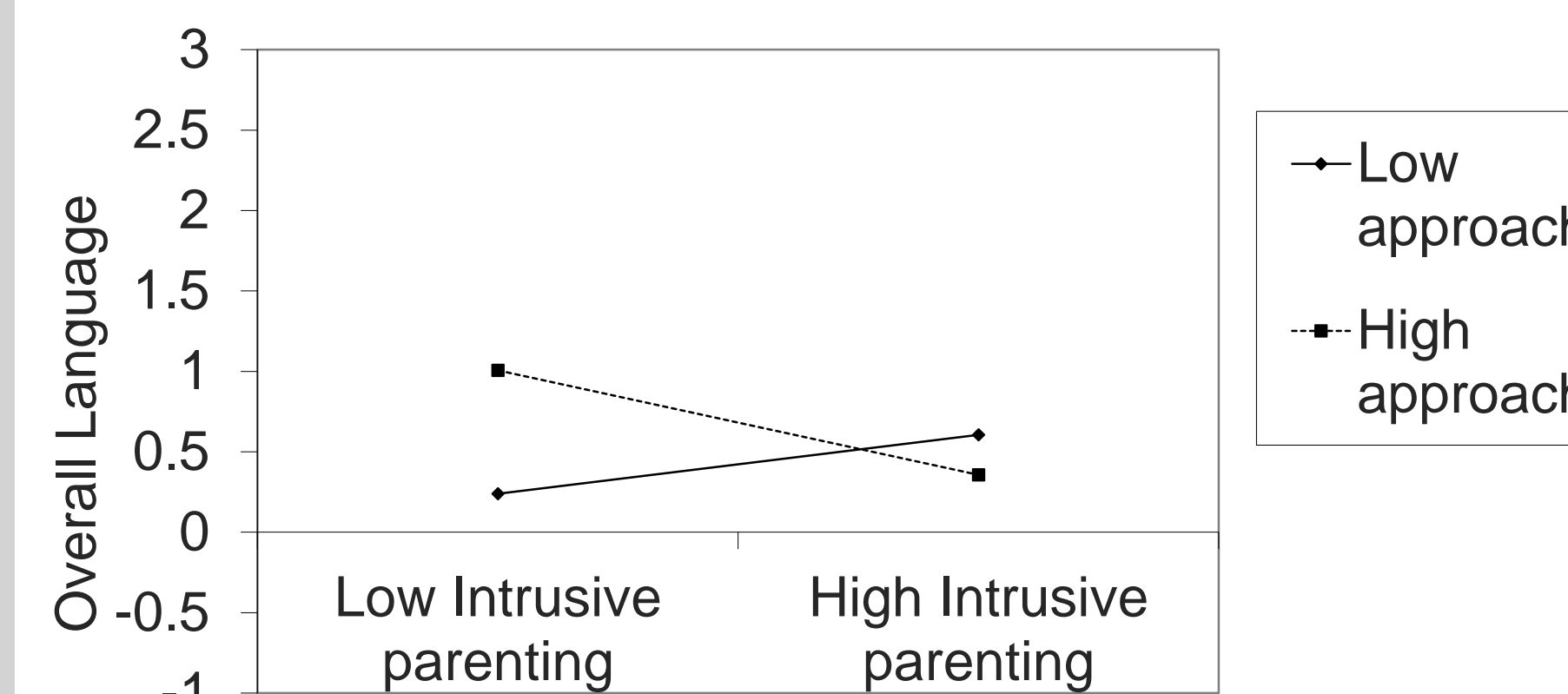
- At 14 months of age, infants were assessed using the expressive and receptive language components of the Bayley Scales of Infant and Toddler Development, 3rd Edition (Reuner, 2006).
 - Analyses were performed considering overall, receptive, and expressive language scores as outcomes.

Results

- Covariates (i.e., cumulative risk, home chaos, and infant gender) were controlled for in all analyses.
- None of the anticipated direct relations were significant.

Results

- Significant interactions were between infant approach and intrusive/insensitive parenting were observed for total language (p = .032), receptive language (p = .018), and expressive language (p = .061).



- For receptive language only, a trend-level (p = .094) interaction between infant fear and intrusive/insensitive parenting was observed.

Discussion

- The current study expanded on existing literature surrounding the relationship between parenting and temperamental factors on early language development.
- These findings point to the importance of examining children's temperament, and specifically approach-based and inhibition-based systems, in interaction with contextual factors (e.g., parenting) for elucidating how these factors contribute to the emergence of early language.
- Intrusive/insensitive parenting was negatively associated with language when children were high in approach, suggesting that approach behaviors (e.g., seeking out stimulation) may only benefit children's language development under more optimal parenting conditions.
- Findings suggest, particularly for children high in approach, that parenting might need to be addressed in addition to language intervention when children are not meeting language-related developmental milestones.
- Future research could expand upon the findings of the present study by considering the interaction of other child temperament factors and parenting behaviors on early language.

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