FACTORS INFLUENCING MOTHERS’ AND FATHERS’ BEHAVIOURS DURING PARENT-CHILD INTERACTION IN THE FIRST TWO YEARS

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Background and aims
In everyday life, parents and their child interact in various contexts. Previous works have shown that mothers and fathers present similarities as well as differences regarding their interactions with their child. Moreover, child’s gender and global family functioning may also influence parental interactional behaviours. The aim of this longitudinal study was to explore the influence of the context in which the interaction takes place, of gender roles and of family alliance on parental behaviours during play.

Methods
We observed parental play behaviours in a sample of 67 volunteer families at 3 (t1), 9 (t2) and 18 months postpartum (t3). We assessed parental behaviours in two different contexts: when alone with the child (D), and in the presence of the other parent (DT). Parents’ behaviours were coded into four categories: stimulation, observation, joint activity and interference. Family alliance was assessed with the Family Alliance Assessment Scales. We computed Generalized Linear Mixed Models to account for both within- and between-person variability.

Results
Results showed that stimulation rate significantly diminished through time, and was significantly higher in the D context, when the child was a girl and in families with a non-optimal alliance. In these families, parents did significantly more interferences and spent less time observing their child and sharing joint activity with her/him. Observation rate was significantly higher in the D context when the child was a boy, but was higher in the DT context when the baby was a girl. Differences in the type of parental behaviours between contexts vary through time. Mothers did significantly more interferences than fathers did. They also tended to share more joint activities with their infant, except at t2.

Conclusions
Our findings suggested that interactional context, gender roles and family functioning influence parental interactive behaviours.