Understanding Parental Bonding: Exploring Family Predictors Using a Latent Growth Curve Model

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Background

Parental bonding is vital for child development and the mental well-being of parents and children. Understanding diverse bonding trajectories and their predictors during the postpartum period is crucial.

1. This study aims to examine **longitudinal trajectories** of **maternal and paternal bonding** at 8 weeks, 14 months, and 24 months after birth.

2. We expected to identify **distinct bonding trajectory groups** influenced by **different rates of bonding difficulties**.

3. We also hypothesized that **predictor variables**, including **depressive**, **anxiety**, **obsessive-compulsive (OCD)**, **somatization**, and **hostility symptoms**, **subjective birth experience**, **child temperament**, **relationship satisfaction**, **multiparity**, **age**, and **education**, would differentially impact trajectory assignment for mothers and fathers.

Fig. 1

Trajectories of Maternal Bonding
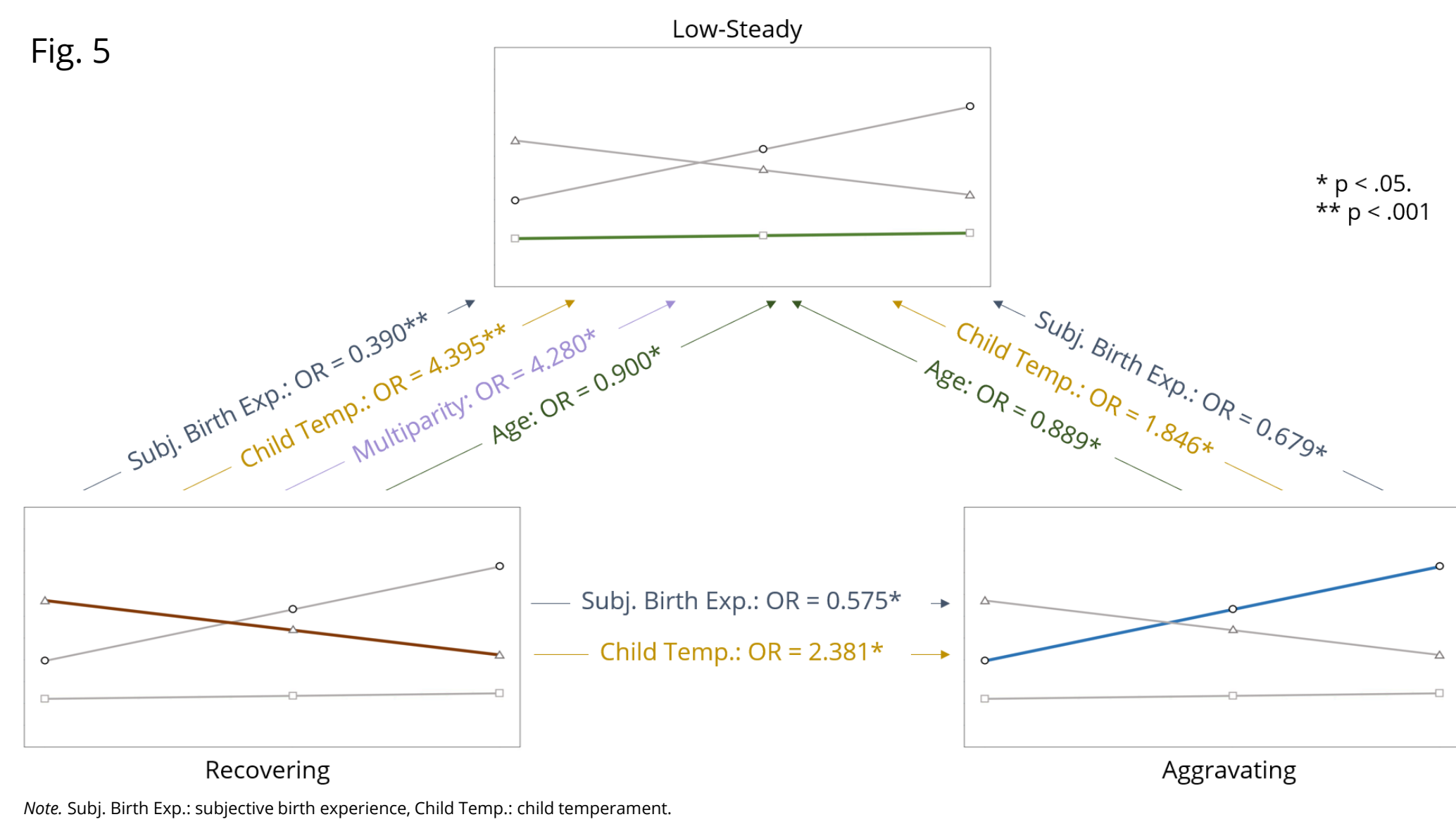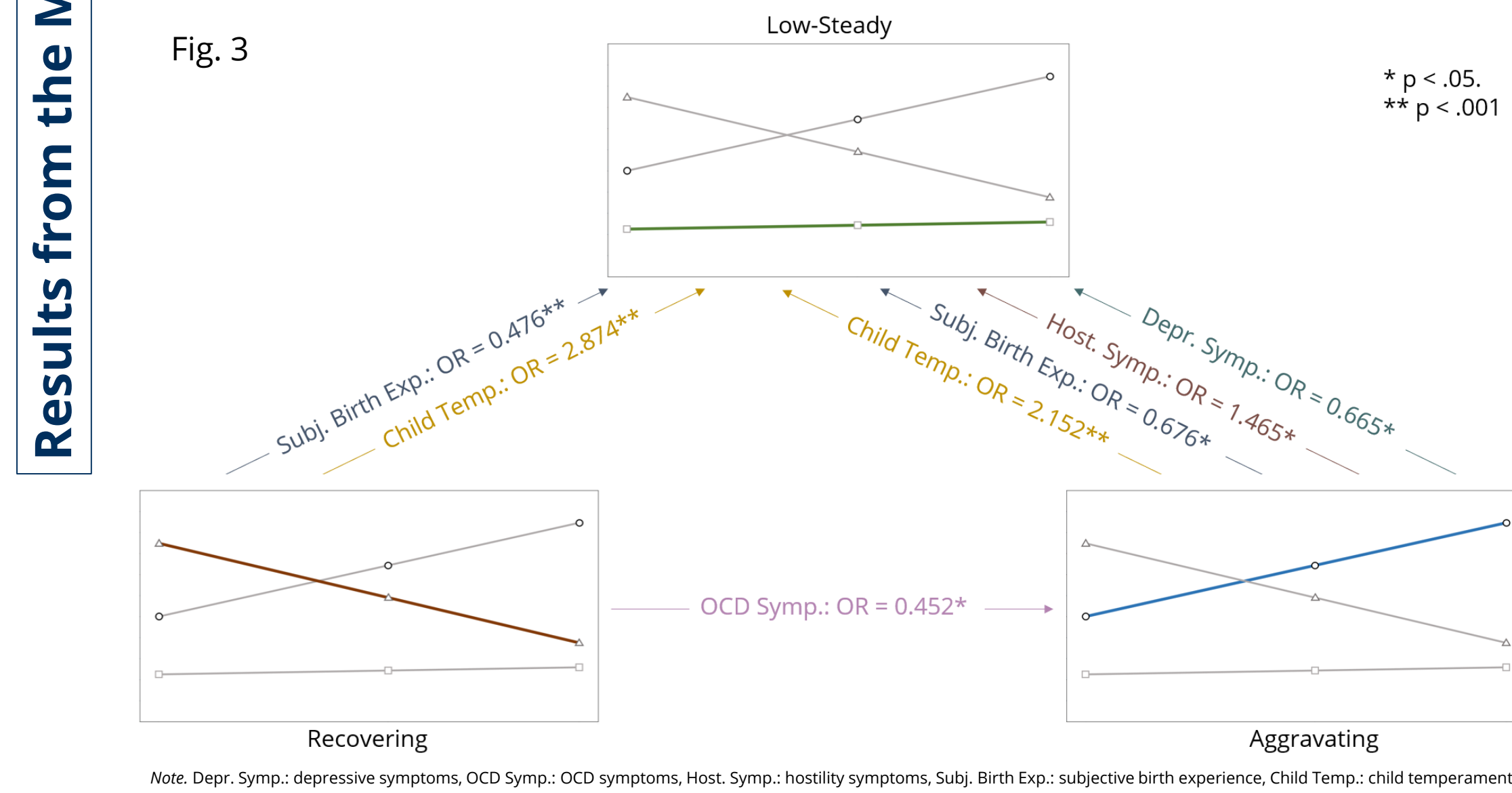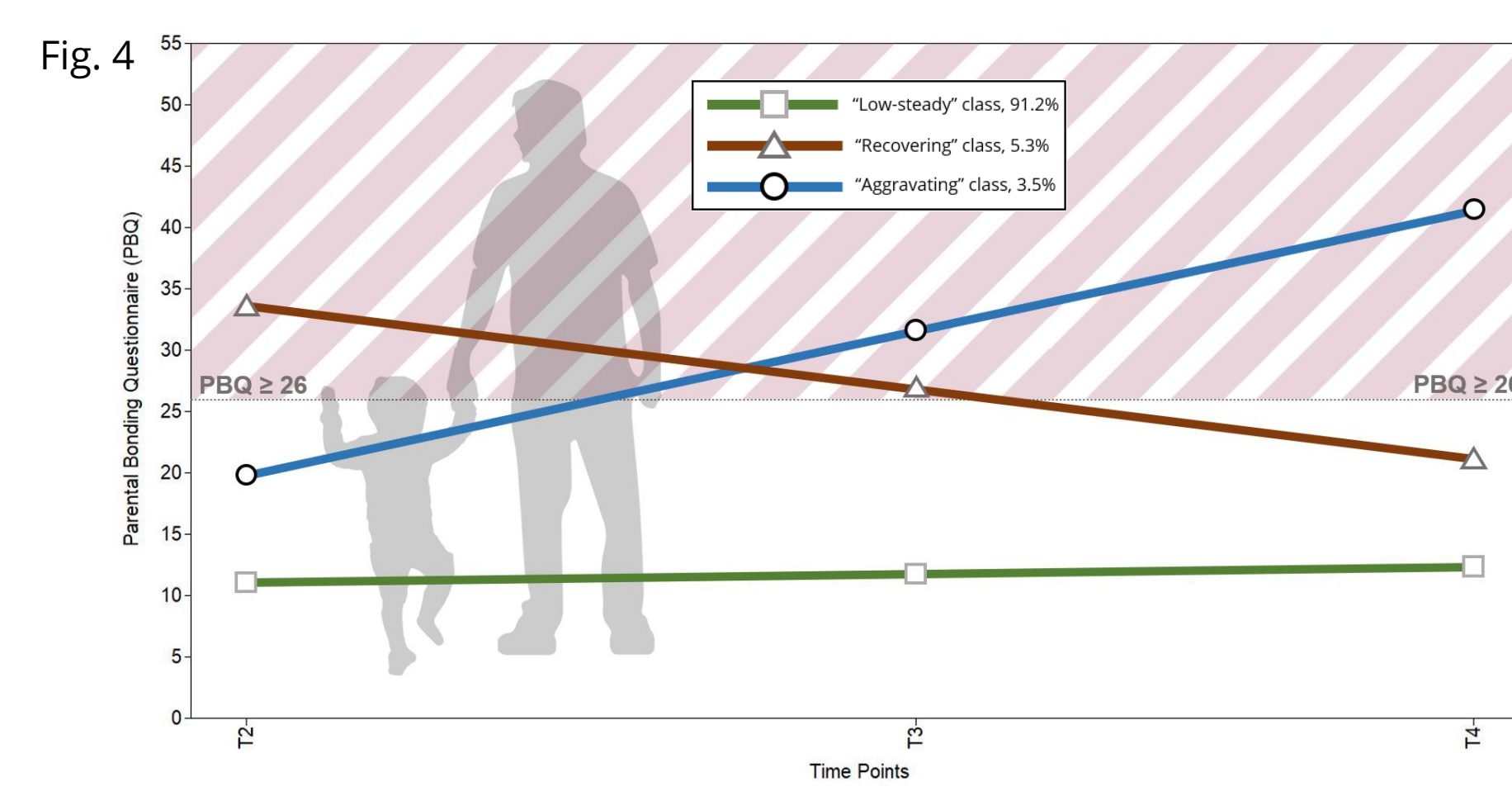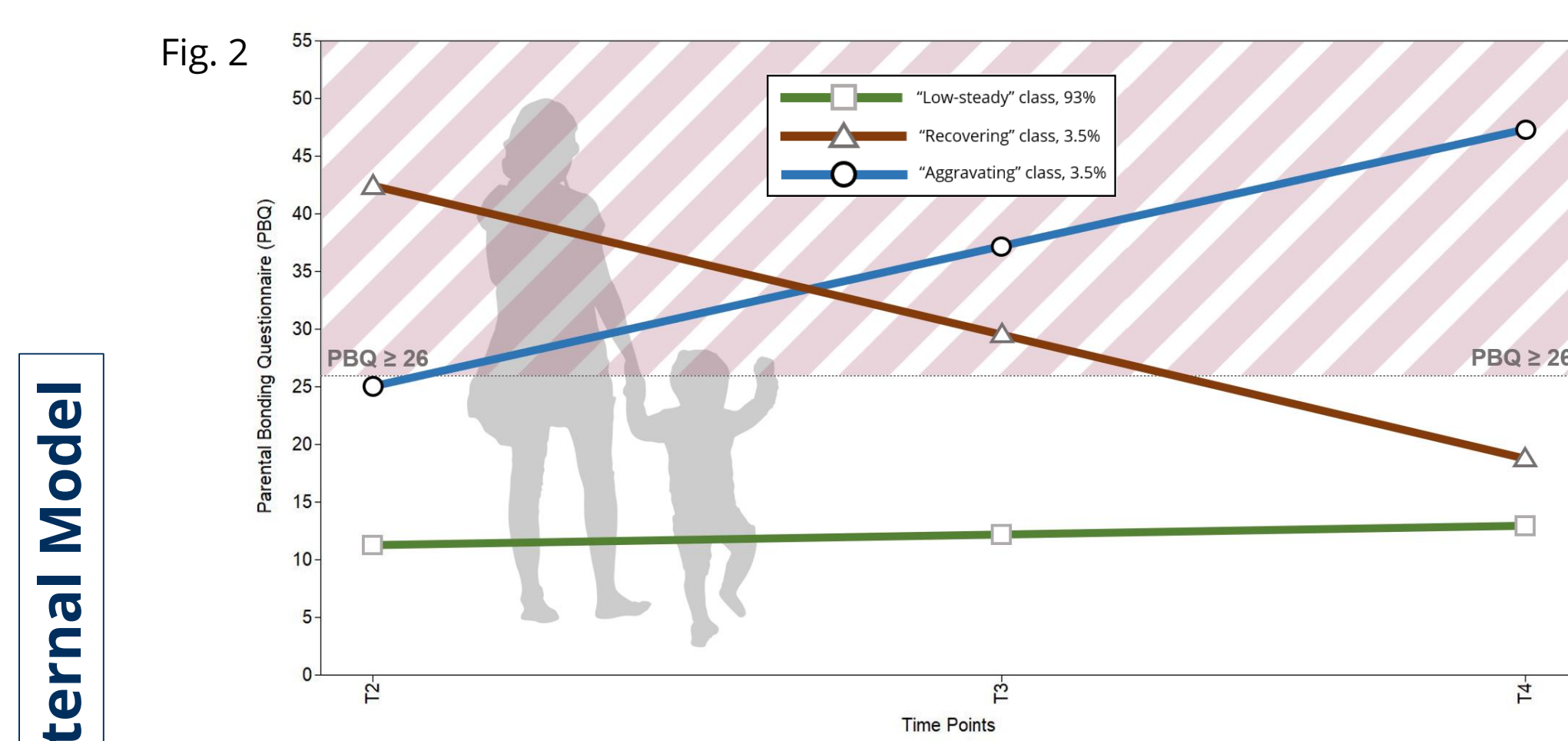
Trajectories of Paternal Bonding
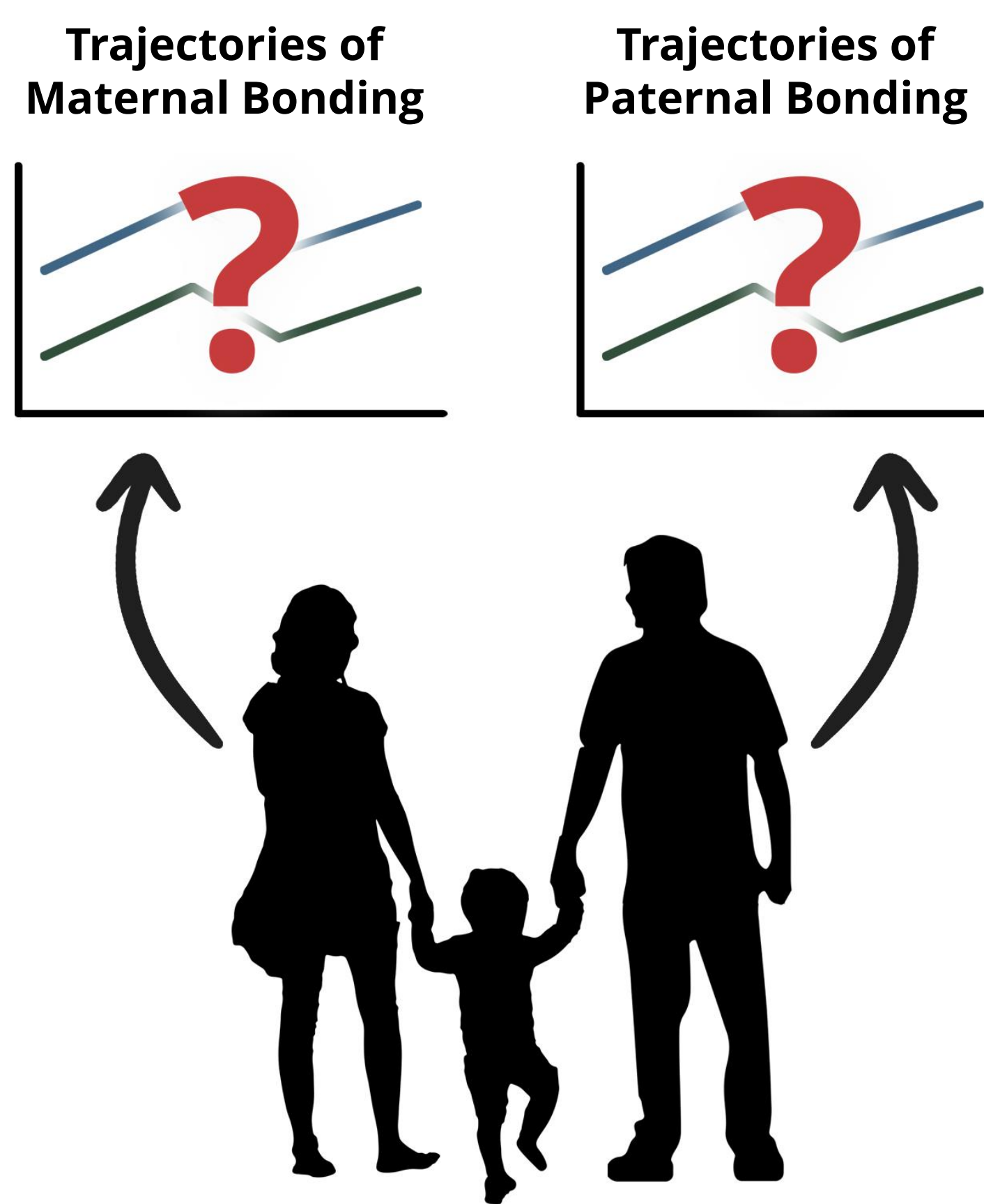
Methods

Dresden Study on Parenting, Work, and Mental Health (DREAM)

Final sample: n = 1,761 mothers, n = 1,128 fathers

T1: during pregnancy
Depressive symptoms (EPDS[1]), anxiety, OCD, somatization, hostility symptoms (SCL-90-R[2]), relationship satisfaction (PFB-K[3]), multiparity, education

T2: 8 weeks after birth
Parental bonding (PBQ[4]), subjective birth experience (SIL[5]), child temperament (ICQ subscale fussy-difficult[6])

T3: 14 months after birth
Parental bonding (PBQ[4])

T4: 2 years after birth
Parental bonding (PBQ[4])

Growth Mixture Models (GMM) and **multinomial logistic regression** calculated to identify distinct bonding trajectories and their predictors

Results from the Maternal Model

Fig. 2

Fig. 3

Note. Depr. Symp.: depressive symptoms, OCD Symp.: OCD symptoms, Host. Symp.: hostility symptoms, Subj. Birth Exp.: subjective birth experience, Child Temp.: child temperament.

Results from the Paternal Model

Fig. 4

Fig. 5

Note. Subj. Birth Exp.: subjective birth experience, Child Temp.: child temperament.

Discussion

Steady and non-steady bonding trajectories revealed

– **"Low-steady"**: stable, low bonding difficulties; mirroring common perception of bonding as steady

– Two novel non-steady classes, **"recovering"** and **"aggravating"**

→ Fluctuating bonding difficulties and clinical-level bonding difficulties (PBQ ≥ 26[7]) during the first 2 years after birth

→ Previously undiscovered → innovative methodology and community-based sample

Negative subjective birth experience and **difficult child temperament** heightened likelihood of entering clinical classes for both mothers and fathers

Mothers with heightened **hostility** or **OCD symptoms** more prone to an escalating bonding trajectory

Younger fathers and those with **prior children** more inclined to non-steady bonding trajectories

Conclusion

This study delved into the longitudinal trajectories of maternal and paternal bonding during the first two years after birth, identifying **three distinct classes** representing **different courses of bonding difficulties** over time.

The revelation of **non-steady** trajectories challenges the **traditional assumption** of **bonding stability**.

Alongside **novel insights** into **predictors** of **trajectory class membership**, this study emphasizes the importance of **recognizing diverse, non-steady bonding patterns**, highlighting the necessity for **tailored interventions** for vulnerable demographics.

References

Figures:
Fig. 1: Study Objective: To Discern the Trajectories of Parental Bonding and Determine their Predictors.
Fig. 2: Estimated Trajectory Means of the Maternal Sample
Fig. 3: Multinomial Regression Results of the Maternal Sample
Fig. 4: Estimated Trajectory Means of the Paternal Sample
Fig. 5: Multinomial Regression Results of the Paternal Sample

References:
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