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Emotion Socialization by Mothers and Fathers: Coherence among Behaviors and Associations with Parent Attitudes and Children's Social Competence

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Abstract

This study examined interrelations among different types of parental emotion socialization behaviors in 88 mothers and 76 fathers (co-residing with participating mothers) of 8-year-old children. Parents completed questionnaires assessing emotion socialization behaviors, emotion-related attitudes, and their children's social functioning. An observed parent-child emotion discourse task and a child social-problem solving interview were also performed. Parent gender differences and concordance within couples in emotion socialization behaviors were identified for some but not all behaviors. Fathers' reactions to child emotion, family expressiveness, and fathers' emotion coaching during discussion cohered, and a model was supported in which the commonality among these behaviors was predicted by fathers' emotion-coaching attitudes, and was associated with children's social competence. A cohesive structure for the emotion socialization construct was less clear for mothers, although attitudes predicted all three types of emotion socialization behavior (reactions, expressiveness, and coaching). Implications for developmental theory and for parent-focused interventions are discussed.

Keywords

emotion; socialization; parenting; gender; social competence

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Although biological factors no doubt contribute to children's ability to manage, understand, and display emotions in a social context, it is generally agreed that children's emotional development is also heavily *socialized* (Denham, Bassett, & Wyatt, 2007; Eisenberg, Cumberland, & Spinrad, 1998; Morris, Silk, Steinberg, Myers, & Robinson, 2007). Many potential environmental contributions to children's emotional development exist, but few rival the salience and continuity of parental influence (Eisenberg, Cumberland, et al, 1998; Kopp, 1989). In their seminal review of the literature, Eisenberg, Cumberland et al. (1998)

identified three primary ways in which parents directly socialize their children's emotional development: parent reactions to children's emotion, parent expressiveness, and parent-child discussion of emotion. Other scholars have organized these constructs somewhat differently (e.g., Denham et al., 2007; Halberstadt, 1991; Morris et al., 2007), but many of the central themes remain constant. A notable divergence involves the distinctiveness of 'emotion coaching,' which is thought to share characteristics with reactions and discussion of emotion, but also implies more complex and high quality structuring or teaching about emotion (Gottman, Katz, & Hooven, 1996; Halberstadt, 1991). In addition to parent expressiveness, family-level expressiveness has also demonstrated importance to children's development (Halberstadt, Crisp, & Eaton, 1999).

Much is known about individual emotion socialization behaviors, but the extent to which these behaviors are meaningfully related has rarely been a focus (Denham & Kochanoff, 2002; Stocker, Richmond, Rhoades, & Kiang, 2007). Primary reliance upon mothers has also resulted in less information about fathers' emotion socialization and the way processes may differ between parents (Denham et al., 2007; Parke & McDowell, 1998). Finally, the focus of emotion socialization literature has generally been on links between parenting and child outcomes—leaving the identification of potential determinants of relevant parenting behaviors an important endeavor (Denham et al., 2007). The current study examined the commonality among parent reactions to children's negative emotions, family expressiveness, and coaching during emotion discussion in mothers and fathers to investigate whether an underlying, core "emotion-coaching approach" to emotion socialization exists. Furthermore, we augmented this comprehensive examination of emotion socialization behaviors by testing a model in which the shared variance among these individual factors was predicted by parent attitudes about emotion and was associated with children's social functioning.

Emotion Socialization Behaviors: Reactions, Expressiveness, and Coaching during Discussion

Supportive reactions to children's negative emotions allow children to explore their emotions and the events surrounding them, to better understand the processes involved, and to learn how to regulate emotions and cope effectively with troublesome situations (Denham et al., 2007; Eisenberg, Cumberland et al., 1998). Research substantiates these propositions, with relations found between supportive parental reactions and child emotion regulation and social competence, and non-supportive reactions and children's social-emotional problems (Eisenberg et al., 1999; Fabes, Poulin, Eisenberg, & Madden-Derdich, 2002).

Expressiveness in the family is thought to influence children's emotional development through many avenues, including social modeling, provision of information about display rules, influence over children's schema formation, and as a backdrop for other socialization behaviors (Campos, Mumme, Kermoian, & Campos, 1994; Dunsmore & Halberstadt, 1997; Halberstadt et al., 1999). Indeed, family-level expressiveness has been empirically linked to a host of child competencies including social (Cassidy, Parke, Butkovsky, & Braungart, 1992) and emotion-regulatory abilities (Garner, 1995). Evidence has clearly related positive family expressiveness to beneficial child competencies, but findings concerning the expression of negative emotion and child functioning are mixed and complex (Halberstadt et al., 1999)—likely due to issues of moderation and/or non-linear effects (Eisenberg, Cumberland et al., 1998; Halberstadt, 1998).

Discussion of emotion provides a rich opportunity for parents to scaffold their children's development, providing children with support, validation, and understanding of social and emotional issues (Malatesta & Haviland, 1985). Studies have linked parent-child discussions of emotion to children's awareness and understanding of emotion (Denham, Cook, & Zoller, 1992; Dunn, Brown, & Beardsall, 1991), own speech about emotion (Dunn, Bretherton, &

Munn, 1987), social problem solving (Fenning, Baker, & Juvonen, in press), and later affective perspective taking (Dunn et al., 1991). Children's ability to discuss and understand emotion may, in turn, underlie emergent capacities for emotion regulation and social competence (Denham et al., 2007; Kopp, 1992). Discourse about emotion is likely most beneficial to children when discussion includes parents' sensitive structuring and acceptance—i.e., emotion coaching (Gottman et al., 1996; Halberstadt, 1991).

Although it is tempting to assume that parenting behavior drives children's social competencies, it is also true that both members of the dyad are being socialized (Bell, 1979; Eisenberg, Cumberland et al., 1998; Morris et al., 2007). Reciprocal influences likely exist, with parent behaviors guiding the child, and child behaviors contributing greatly to the affective tenor of emotion-related interactions, and requiring adaptation on the part of the parent. Indeed, Katz, Gottman, and Hooven (1996), revealed strong evidence for bidirectional effects and suggested that better child regulation may facilitate parental coaching and may allow children to take better advantage of coaching.

Coherence among Emotion Socialization Behaviors

There is an intuitive assumption that emotion socialization behaviors should cohere, or that parents who engage in certain types of emotion socialization will also engage in others. The few studies that examined inter-relations revealed meaningful associations among parent expressiveness, reactions, and emotion-related discussion (Denham & Kochanoff, 2002; Stocker et al., 2007). However, these relations were not always consistent (Denham & Kochanoff, 2002) and other evidence has been mixed (Gottman, Katz, & Hooven, 1997; Ramsden & Hubbard, 2002). Identification of the extent of commonality among emotion socialization behaviors therefore remains an important research task, particularly given potential implications for therapeutic intervention.

Parent Attitudes as a Predictor of an Emotion-Coaching Approach

Although the notion that emotion socialization behaviors are in part defined by parental beliefs and attitudes may be appealing (Eisenberg, Spinrad, & Cumberland, 1998), relevant empirical research has been scarce. One of the two most notable exceptions is the work of Gottman and colleagues (1996) on meta-emotion philosophy (see also Dunsmore & Karn, 2001). *Meta-emotion philosophy* represents parental attitudes toward emotion and provides a useful framework for conceptualizing interrelations among parents' emotion socialization behaviors (Gottman et al., 1996). Parents with an *emotion-coaching* philosophy are comfortable with emotion in themselves and their children and see child emotion as an opportunity for intimacy, teaching, encouragement of expression, and exploration of emotion. In contrast, *emotion-dismissing* parents view negative emotions as harmful and perceive their task as needing to rid their child of these emotions quickly (Gottman et al., 1996, 1997). Accordingly, parents with an emotion coaching philosophy should respond to children's negative emotions in a supportive way, foster emotional expressiveness in their families, and provide their children with sensitive structuring and acceptance during emotion discourse (Denham & Kochanoff, 2002), collectively reflective of an underlying emotion-coaching approach. This structure has not yet been established, despite significant implications for meta-emotion theory. The potential for clinical impact is also clear, as evidence of belief-behavior relations would underscore the benefit of working with parents to alter attitudes as a precursor to fundamental behavioral change.

Gottman et al. (1996) found that parents with higher emotion coaching philosophies performed better scaffolding-praising and displayed less derogation during parent-child laboratory interactions. Although these ratings captured important information about how parents engaged with their children during frustrating/teaching tasks, the observational

systems used did not measure key emotion coaching behaviors specifically (e.g., validation vs. minimization of emotion, emotion talk/focus). Gottman et al. (1997) did not find associations between coaching philosophies and parental expressiveness, but relations between parental expressivity and value placed on teaching about emotion have been established in other work (Denham & Kochanoff, 2002), suggesting the importance of further study in this area.

Parent Gender Differences in Emotion Socialization Beliefs and Behaviors

Gottman and colleagues (1996) found that fathers reported less awareness of emotion and held lower emotion coaching attitudes than did mothers. Interestingly, this study also identified stronger and more consistent relations between parent emotion-coaching attitudes and parenting behaviors, and between coaching attitudes and child outcome, for fathers than for mothers. Little is known regarding differences in the emotion socialization behaviors of mothers and fathers (Denham et al., 2007, Parke & McDowell, 1998). Some evidence suggests that fathers may engage in more punitive responses and less supportive reactions to child emotion than mothers (Eisenberg, Fabes, & Murphy, 1996; McElwain, Halberstadt, & Volling, 2007). Furthermore, process-level differences have been identified, with fathers' reactions demonstrating stronger relations to child functioning in one study (Carson & Parke, 1996), and weaker relations in others (e.g., Denham & Kochanoff, 2002). Findings regarding parent-gender differences in emotional expressiveness have been mixed (e.g., Denham et al., 2000; Garner, Robertson, & Smith, 1997)—leaving the possibility of gender differences in expression unresolved. Although early studies did not find parent-gender differences in emotion discourse, more recent work suggests that mothers may participate more in parent-child discussions about emotion, exhibit a heavier focus on emotion, and use more emotion words than fathers (Fivush, Brotman, Buckner, & Goodman, 2000). With regard to emotion coaching, mothers tend to endorse attitudes consonant with coaching behaviors more so than fathers (Gottman et al., 1997), and adolescents have reported receiving fewer coaching behaviors from their fathers than from their mothers (Stocker et al., 2007).

Although understanding differences between mothers and fathers in emotion socialization is necessary to advance developmental theory, it is also critical to examine concordance within couples. Children develop within a family system and considerable evidence has linked agreement and cooperation in parenting to healthy child outcomes (see McHale, 2007). However, at least one study has suggested the provocative possibility that children may benefit most when some degree of divergence exists in the emotion socialization strategies of their mothers and fathers (McElwain et al., 2007). Furthermore, some scholars have speculated that fathers' emotion socialization behaviors might be indirectly related to child outcome through concordance with maternal behavior (Denham & Kochanoff, 2002). Studies reporting on mother-father associations have predominantly generated mixed results. McElwain et al. (2007) found that parents' self-reported reactions to children's negative emotions were moderately associated with those of their partners. Conversely, Eisenberg et al., (1996) reported substantial lack of agreement in reactions within couples. Evidence of concordance in parent's own expressiveness in the family seems to suggest small and/or non-significant associations (e.g., Cassidy et al., 1992; Halberstadt, Cassidy, Stifter, Parke, & Fox, 1995). Although concordance for coaching during discussion, as conceived for the present study, has not yet been examined, related studies have produced mixed findings. Gottman et al. (1996) reported no meaningful concordance between parents on measures of scaffolding-praising or derogation during a frustrating task, but Baker and Crnic (2009) reported consistency in the degree to which parents focused on emotional themes during parent-child discourse.

The Current Study and Hypotheses

Most emotion socialization research has been performed with families of preschool-age children (see Denham et al., 2007). However, more recent studies have focused on middle childhood (Cassano, Perry-Parrish, & Zeman, 2007), a time when key developmental advances in children's emotion understanding likely allow for increased comprehension of more sophisticated socialization opportunities (Denham & Kochanoff, 2002; Saarni, Mumme, & Campos, 1998). The current study investigated parental socialization of emotion in families of 8-year-old children. The examination of commonality among emotion socialization behaviors through latent variable modeling was a key goal of the present study. Understanding the nature of *shared* variance is critical not only to advancing conceptualizations of an underlying emotion-coaching approach, but is also central to enhancing current parent-training interventions. Indeed, many treatments capitalize upon the presence of overlapping behavioral dimensions to create change by initiating cascading effects, and parental beliefs and attitudes are often targeted as potentially pivotal entry points. It was predicted that parental reactions, family expressiveness, and emotion coaching during discussion would be meaningfully related and would load onto a single latent variable. This variable, in turn, was expected to be predicted positively by parent emotion-coaching attitudes.

In addition, it was hypothesized that the commonality among emotion-coaching socialization behaviors would be associated positively with children's social competencies (Denham & Grout, 1993). Given the cross-sectional nature of the present study, the age of the children, and the high likelihood of bidirectional effects, we did not posit a direction of effect for this pathway. Rather, we were primarily interested in assessing the overall degree to which emotion-coaching approach was associated with children's adaptive social functioning.

Although links were expected to hold for both parents, we predicted that fathers would exhibit greater and/or more consistent associations among attitudes, behaviors, and child competencies (Carson & Parke, 1996; Gottman et al., 1996). Regarding mean-level differences between parents on constructs of interest, we predicted that fathers would report lower emotion-coaching attitudes and would engage in less optimal coaching behaviors than would mothers. Concordance was expected within couples for all core variables except for reactions, the domain for which the clearest evidence of divergence has emerged (e.g., Eisenberg et al., 1996).

Method

Participants

Data on families of 8-year old children (58% male) were drawn from a larger longitudinal study examining family processes in the emergence of social-emotional problems and competencies in children with and without early developmental risk. Only children whose 5-year cognitive testing placed them within the typically developing range ($IQ > 85$) were included in the present study due to the possibility that child developmental risk might influence the parenting behaviors under investigation (Baker & Crnic, 2009; Fenning et al., in press). Given our primary emphasis on interrelations among emotion socialization behaviors, obtaining complete data in this area was prioritized. Thus, participants were included only if they had data on Reactions to emotion, Expressiveness, and Coaching during Discussion. Of 105 mothers, 13 did not have data on Coaching during Discussion, and 4 did not return the questionnaires (no information on Reactions or Expressiveness). Of the 91 fathers, 8 did not have Coaching during Discussion data and 7 did not return forms. The final sample therefore consisted of 88 mothers and 76 fathers—all of whom also

provided data on their Emotion Attitudes. No major demographic variables discriminated between families with and without the necessary data. Complete data were available for 76 couples (i.e., all mother data were available for all included fathers).

One quarter of the families were recruited from rural/suburban Central Pennsylvania and three quarters of the families from the greater Los Angeles area. No significant differences emerged on key study variables as a function of research site. Ethnic and racial identification for mothers/fathers was reported as Caucasian and non-Hispanic (67/72%), Hispanic (17/11%), African-American (9/4%), Asian (5/4%), and “other” (2/9%). Of the 12 mothers included in this study who did not have accompanying father data, 10 were separated or divorced and 2 were never married. No significant differences existed between mothers with or without partners on the variables of interest. Mean family income fell between \$50,000 and \$70,000 per year and was not related to any variable of interest. Maternal education (mean grade completed = 15.89, $SD=2.86$) related only to mothers’ scores on Overall Coaching during Discussion, $r = .22, p < .05$, and was therefore not controlled. Father education ($M = 15.10, SD=3.74$) was related to the Coaching during Discussion Subscale for both mothers and fathers, $r = .36, p < .01$, and $.24, p < .05$ respectively, and was therefore controlled when examining within couple concordance on this variable. The number of siblings in the family ($M=1.39, SD=1.28$) was related to mothers’ unsupportive reactions and maternal report of negative family expressiveness, each $r = .22, p < .05$, and was therefore controlled in relevant analyses.

Procedure

Questionnaires were mailed to families prior to their scheduled home visit and were returned at the visit. Parents were asked to complete the questionnaires separately so that their unique perspectives could be obtained. At the home visit, parents each participated in an identical parent-child emotion discourse task and a social problem solving interview was performed with the children. The parent-child discourse task was adapted from procedures used to elicit parent-child discussion of emotion (e.g. Fivush et al. 2000) and has been described in detail in previous reports from our laboratory (Baker & Crnic, 2009; Fenning et al., in press). Parents were told to think of a recent incident when the child was ‘upset’. The parent and child were then asked to talk about the incident until they felt they were finished. Three minutes were allotted for the discussion, although dyads could end the task early to approximate naturalistic interaction. Mothers and fathers engaged in the discussion separately with the focal child and were asked not to discuss the generated incidents in advance. Fathers participated first, and mothers were situated so as to prevent overhearing the initial dyad’s discussion.

Measures

Parental emotion-coaching attitudes—were measured through the Maternal Emotional Styles Questionnaire (MESQ; Lagacé-Séguin & Coplan, 2005). This measure was adapted from the Meta-Emotion Interview (MEI-Revised; Katz & Gottman, 1999), and assessed emotion coaching and emotion-dismissing perspectives. The form consisted of 14 statements that described parental attitudes and beliefs about their children’s emotions, and about child emotion in general. Parents were asked to rate the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with each statement on a scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Examples of the seven emotion coaching statements (summed for the coaching composite) included, “When my child is sad, it’s an opportunity for getting close,” and “When my child is angry, I want to know what he/she is thinking.” Examples of the seven emotion-dismissing statements included, “When my child is sad, I am expected to fix the world and make it perfect,” and “When my child gets angry, my goal is to get him/her to stop.” The MESQ is internally consistent, highly correlated with the original MEI, and

convergent validity with parental goals and maternal depression has been established (Lagacé-Séguin & Coplan, 2005; Lagacé-Séguin & d'Entremont, 2006). Internal reliabilities for the current study resulted in alphas of .73 for coaching (for both mothers and fathers), .77 for maternal dismissing, and .70 for paternal dismissing. Although the psychometric properties of the MESQ have not yet been studied with fathers, it was believed that no modifications were necessary for use with this population (Lagacé-Séguin, personal communication, 2005). Furthermore, the original MEI upon which the MESQ was based was used with fathers, and the internal consistencies of the scales for fathers in the present study were commensurate with those reported in studies of mothers. Although the MESQ was originally developed for parents of preschoolers, the items are not age-specific and recent studies have supported its use with children up to 13 years of age (Lagacé-Séguin & Gionet, 2009).

Meta-emotion has been conceptualized in many ways. Gottman et al. (1996) used only the coaching aspects of the construct due to the high interrelation between the two philosophies. However, the MESQ has demonstrated a two-factor structure, with emotion coaching and dismissing discussed separately (Lagacé-Séguin & Coplan, 2005). Because the two scales were uncorrelated in the current study (see Table 1), it was not reasonable to choose one scale over the other. However, a composite score for coaching was preferable to modeling multiple variables, and was thought to provide a more robust measure of emotion coaching attitudes. Parents' dismissing scores on the MESQ were therefore subtracted from their coaching scores for use in the structural model, but information on the subscales is presented for all other analyses. The composite variable was significantly correlated with coaching and dismissing ratings for each parent (see Table 1).

Parental reactions to child emotion—were assessed through the widely-used Coping with Children's Negative Emotions Scale (CCNES; Fabes et al., 2002). This questionnaire presented parents with 12 vignettes involving child negative emotion and asked them to rate the likelihood that they would respond in six particular ways. These responses related to six subscales which have often been combined as they were in the current study—into “supportive” (expressive-encouragement, emotion-focused, and problem-focused subscales) and “unsupportive” reactions (punitive, minimizing, and distress subscales). Adequate internal consistency, test-retest reliability, and construct validity for this scale has been reported (Fabes et al., 2002) and internal reliabilities for the current study were .77 (unsupportive) and .77 (supportive) for mothers, and .70 (supportive) and .75 (unsupportive) for fathers. Although the CCNES has been used most commonly with the families of preschool children, several studies have supported its use in middle childhood (e.g., Jones, Eisenberg, Fabes, & MacKinnon, 2002). As with the attitudes measure, reactions scores were combined for use in the model, with unsupportive reactions subtracted from supportive reactions. Both the individual subscales and the overall composite were considered for all other analyses.

Family expressiveness—was measured using the Family Expressiveness Questionnaire (FEQ; Halberstadt, 1986) positive and negative expressiveness scales (20-items each). The FEQ asked parents to rate the frequency at which certain emotional expressions occurred in their households. Events such as “spontaneously hugging a family member” were rated on a 7-point scale ranging from “*not at all frequently*” to “*very frequently*.” Adequate internal consistency, test-retest reliability, and convergent and divergent validity have been demonstrated for this form (Halberstadt, 1986; Ramsden & Hubbard, 2002). Given the expectation that negative expressiveness would not cohere in a linear fashion with other socialization behaviors, only positive expressiveness was used in the final model, although data are presented for negative expressiveness for all other analyses.

Parental coaching during discussion—was measured through observational rating of the emotion discourse task. Raters used a global rating system, created for the current study, to assess parental emotion coaching and emotion dismissing behaviors. The emotion coaching code was comprised of five components thought to represent behavioral manifestations of an emotion coaching philosophy, as outlined by Gottman et al. (1997) including the amount of structuring that the parent provided, the parent's general sensitivity and acceptance of the child, the parent's validation and encouragement of emotional expression, the parent's enthusiasm for the task, and the amount of intimacy, warmth and affection present in the dyad during the discussion. Following a videotaped review of the task, coders rated each dimension on a 5-point scale, and these items were averaged into an overall emotion coaching score (α for mothers and fathers was each .87). The dismissing code was similarly based on the work of Gottman and colleagues and was comprised of parental derogation of the child, intrusiveness, and minimization and/or discouragement of child emotion (3 items). These ratings were combined into an overall dismissing score that exhibited adequate internal reliability (α for mothers = .75, fathers = .79). Inter-rater reliability was performed on 20% of the tapes and was acceptable for mothers (coaching intra-class correlation = .76, dismissing = .82) and fathers (coaching = .79, dismissing = .74). Each parent's coaching and dismissing ratings were inversely correlated (see Table 1) and a composite score for each parent was created by subtracting the dismissing rating from the coaching rating.

Children's broad social competence—was assessed by the Social Skills Scale of the Social Skills Rating System, as reported by parents and teachers (SSRS; Gresham & Elliott, 1990), and by the Social Problem Solving Measure, an interview performed with the children themselves (SPSM; Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group, 1991). The 30-item Social Skills Scale of the SSRS included ratings of the child's responsibility (parent version only), cooperation, self-control, and assertiveness, and the scale has high test-retest reliability and internal consistency (Gresham & Elliott, 1990). In the present study, parent scores were correlated, $r = .37, p < .001$, and were combined. Parent composite scores from the single mothers (14% of the sample) were represented by mother ratings only, but the overall parent-SSRS scores did not differ as a function of marital status. The parent composite was averaged with teacher report (which was associated with parent scores, $r = .48, p < .001$), to generate a single, multi-informant SSRS score. This final measure was intentionally weighted to include half (rather than one-third) teacher report, so as to further minimize any potential shared method variance with parents' report of their own behaviors. The overall SSRS scores for the 19% of children with missing teacher data were represented by parent report only. However, the overall SSRS ratings did not differ as a function of whether or not teacher data were included.

The SPSM is a well validated interview measure designed to assess children's ability to access and generate problem-solving strategies in response to challenging social situations. The SPSM contains eight vignettes of scenarios involving peer entry or resolution of a social conflict. The experimenter read each vignette to the child while displaying a pictorial representation. Following each story, the child was asked to tell the experimenter what he or she would "say or do" to resolve the situation. The child was prompted for three responses to each scenario. For the present study, responses were assigned to one of 15 mutually exclusive categories. Fenning et al. (in press) performed a fine-grained analysis of the SPSM data with the present sample and concluded that a composite of two associated categories provided the best representation of children's prosocial problem-solving skills: an average of the total number of simple asking and positive negotiating strategies generated (association between these scores, $r = .21, p < .05$). Reliability was calculated based upon coders' consensus ratings for 20% of the interviews. Overall reliability was very good ($\kappa = .92$) and the reliability for each of the scales used in the present study was above .70. The prosocial

problem-solving composite was related to both parent and teacher report on the SSRS ($r = .24$, $p < .05$, and $r = .30$, $p < .05$, respectively). Children's SSRS and SPSM scores were standardized then averaged in order to provide a single, robust and relatively unbiased measure of children's social competence. A composite variable was used in lieu of a latent variable approach due to sample-size considerations and the primary focus of the present study on parenting behaviors.

Results

Coherence among Emotion Socialization Behaviors

Correlations among all variables are presented in Table 1. We focused on the composites derived from the measures in order to minimize the possibility of Type I error, to reduce the number of variables considered in the structural models, and because we were primarily interested in capturing broad aspects of the socialization environment. However, subscale data are valuable and are reported in Tables 1 and 2 as well. Significant coherence was observed among all three overall emotion coaching behaviors for fathers. For mothers, Reactions and Expressiveness were moderately related but neither was meaningfully associated with mothers' observed Coaching during Discussion. Correlations among composite variables did not differ between mothers and fathers as per Fisher's r -to- z comparisons. Due to the significant interrelation among behaviors for fathers, Reactions, Expressiveness, and Coaching during Discussion were used as indicators for a single latent variable in a final structural equation model (SEM). Although associations were modest, it was deemed important to pursue a latent variable approach given the potential to obtain unique information (i.e., whether Attitudes and Child Social Competence related to the *shared* variance among the behaviors).

Parent Cognitions, Emotion-Coaching Behaviors, and Children's Social Competence

For fathers, a model was tested in which fathers' report of Emotion-Coaching Attitudes predicted a latent construct of Emotion-Coaching Approach—with Reactions, Expressiveness, and Coaching during Discussion serving as indicators (see Figure 1). As discussed, no hypothesis of the directionality between Emotion-Coaching Approach and Children's Social Competence was posited. However, testing of the model required selecting a direction for the pathway, so the model was first tested with the child variable predicting parent behaviors, and then in the other direction. No missing data existed in this model. In addition to the examination of pathways, five indices of good model fit were examined: a non-significant chi-square test (χ^2), a ratio of χ^2 divided by degrees of freedom between 1 and 2, a CFI above .90, and an RMSEA less than .08. The Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) was used to compare the relative fit of non-nested models, with smaller AIC values indicating better model fit.

The proposed father model, seen in Figure 1, exhibited excellent fit. Furthermore, all pathways between the latent variable and the indicators, and between the predictors and the latent variable, were significant. The model explained 68% of the variance in fathers' Emotion-Coaching Approach. The alternative model, with fathers' Emotion-Coaching Approach predicting Children's Social Competence did not appear to fit the data—with a significant chi-square, a low CFI, a high RMSEA, and a higher AIC than the original model, $\chi^2(5) = 16.52$, $p < .001$; CFI = .76, RMSEA = .18, AIC = 46.52 (original model AIC = 35.30).

The model tested for mothers was identical to that of fathers, except that the Coaching during Discussion variable was isolated from the Emotion-Coaching Approach latent variable due to low associations between Discussion and the other two variables (see Figure

1). Attitudes and the child composite were retained as predictors of both the latent variable and Coaching during Discussion. The proposed model fit the data well (see Figure 1). However, pathways between Children's Social Competence and the parenting behavior variables were not significant. All pathways between Attitudes and emotion-socialization behaviors, and between the latent construct and its indicators, were significant for mothers. Post-hoc analyses revealed that, when considered separately, mothers' reports of their children's social competence (SSRS) were significantly associated with maternal Emotion-Coaching Approach, $\beta = .35, p < .05$.

Mean Differences and Concordance within Couples

Descriptive data are presented in Table 2. As per paired-samples *t*-tests, mothers reported higher Emotion-Coaching Attitudes, higher supportive Reactions to children's negative emotions, and more Expressiveness than did fathers. However, no significant differences between mothers and fathers emerged in observed overall ratings of Coaching during Discussion. It is important to note that the order of emotion discussions was not counterbalanced so these null results should be interpreted with caution (see Table 2).

No differences existed on emotion attitudes or behaviors of mothers as a function of whether the target children were boys or girls. For fathers, child gender was significantly associated with Emotion Coaching Attitudes only. Fathers whose target children were sons reported higher Coaching Attitudes, $t = -2.29, p < .05$, than fathers of daughters. It is also interesting to note that there was a tendency toward increased variability in emotion Attitudes and in Coaching during Discussion when fathers had sons, Levene's $F(1, 74) = 3.70, p = .06$ and $F(1, 74) = 3.50, p = .07$, respectively.

Concordance within couples was identified for reported Emotion-Coaching Attitudes and for observed Coaching during Discussion. Each parent's report of Positive Expressiveness was associated with their partner's at the level of a trend, and no concordance was observed for Negative Expressiveness or reported reactions to children's emotions (see Table 2).

Discussion

Several theoretically related but distinct parenting behaviors have been convincingly associated with children's emotional development (Denham et al., 2007; Eisenberg, Cumberland et al., 1998; Morris et al., 2007). A critical next step for research and intervention is to understand the degree to which these parenting behaviors exist within an organized system or function independently. Findings from the current study suggest the presence of a coherent structure for fathers' emotion socialization, with a significant underlying commonality observed between paternal reactions to emotion, positive family expressiveness, and coaching quality during emotion discourse. Furthermore, fathers' emotion-coaching approach to socialization was predicted by important cognitive and contextual factors, including fathers' attitudes toward emotion and children's social functioning. In contrast, mothers exhibited less overall coherence in emotion socialization. Although maternal attitudes toward emotion predicted all socialization behaviors, complex ties to child competencies were apparent.

Evidence that emotion-coaching related models of beliefs, behaviors, and child factors are clearer for fathers than for mothers converges strongly with the findings of Gottman and colleagues (1996). Due to the changing nature of manhood and fatherhood, it is possible that increased variation has emerged in how fathers think about emotions and the parenting role, which may contribute to heightened levels of association (Gottman et al., 1997). Yet, in the present study, fathers were no more variable in their emotion socialization attitudes and behaviors than were mothers, although fathers of boys did exhibit a trend toward greater

variability as compared to fathers of girls. Thus, notions of emotion and masculinity may be more closely tied to the object of fathers' socializing efforts rather than the nature of fathering per se. Fathers may also have more limited exposure to their children as well as greater flexibility in defining the amount and nature of their parenting involvement (Walker & McGraw, 2000); consequently, fathers may have more freedom to rely upon their underlying internal representations of emotional parenting. Interestingly, fathers' emotion socialization behaviors were also more strongly related to child competencies than was the case for mothers. This contrasts with previous evidence suggesting that fathers might exert primary influence upon preschoolers' emotional competence through associations with maternal socialization practices (Denham & Kochanoff, 2002). Given that the current study revealed important relations between paternal approach to emotion socialization and children's social functioning, fathers may become more involved in this aspect of emotional development as children enter middle childhood and increasingly participate in relevant interpersonal exchanges.

Based upon theory and previous research, it was predicted that the proposed construct of emotion-coaching behavioral style would hold for both mothers and fathers, which rendered the limited observed coherence in mothers' emotion socialization behaviors somewhat surprising. Although emotion-coaching behavior implies an inclination toward positive expressivity (Gottman et al., 1997), it is possible to exhibit such an approach without demonstrating significant positive affect and vice versa. A divergence was also observed between mothers' emotion coaching behaviors and reported reactions to child emotion, despite the conceptual similarity of these dimensions. The structured nature of the discourse task may have produced behaviors reflective of parents' socialization *abilities*, which may differ from what occurs spontaneously. Emotion coaching ratings also emphasized the *quality* of parenting behavior, and this was not necessarily the case for parent report of reactions.

Although mothers' approach to emotion socialization was not significantly related to children's overall social competence, a meaningful association was observed between maternal perceptions of child social skills and mothers' socialization behaviors. In-the-moment emotion socialization exchanges may be driven significantly by child behavior, and children's social behaviors with their mothers are often somewhat different from those with other individuals (Gresham & Elliot, 1990). Mothers may also be more involved in the daily caretaking of their children (Patterson, Sutfin, & Fulcher, 2004), leading them to rely more strongly than fathers on their own perceptions of child competencies as a guide to emotion-related parenting. Furthermore, although social problem-solving and social regulation have been linked empirically (Crick & Dodge, 1994), use of a child construct more proximal to the type of parent emotion socialization examined in this study (e.g., emotion regulation) might generate stronger results.

Consistent with previous literature, fathers in the present study reported less optimal emotion-related attitudes and behaviors than did mothers. Interestingly, fathers did not differ from mothers in the quality of observed emotion-coaching behaviors during discussion. There are several possible explanations for this finding. First, order effects may have increased the potential for rich discussion and child participation during father discussions, which preceded mother-child conversations. In addition, because parents were explicitly instructed to discuss an emotional event, it is possible that fathers are *able* to provide high quality emotion coaching, but may do so less spontaneously. Anecdotal observations further suggested that mothers often utilized the emotion discourse task as a specific opportunity to initiate child behavioral change, whereas fathers appeared to feel freer to remain child-centered and to explore emotional aspects of the events (see Denham et al., 2007). A final possibility is that fathers tend to underestimate their emotion coaching abilities.

Concordance within couples was found for emotion-coaching attitudes and for coaching during discussion, suggesting partner-selection biases and/or parenting cooperation within the dyad. What is remarkable is that, despite similar attitudes and coaching behaviors, and the fact that both parents were responding to the same child, virtually no concordance was exhibited for reactions to children's emotions. Although this low concordance rate is fully consistent with previous work (Eisenberg et al., 1996), further study is needed to clarify this finding. Research has suggested low or non-significant concordance for parents' own expressiveness within the family. Although parents in the current study reported on family and not self-expressiveness, the low concordance observed suggests that parents may have been primarily attending to their own behavior, and further investigation of associations between self- and family-expressiveness is necessary.

Implications for Intervention

Despite increasing evidence of associations between parent emotion socialization and children's emotional competence, few intervention programs have targeted emotion socialization specifically. Evidence from the present study of commonality among emotion socialization behaviors and identification of an underlying emotion-coaching behavioral style for fathers provides considerable insight into possible mechanisms of change. For instance, given the interconnectedness of emotion socialization behaviors, it may be possible to alter a single behavior and thereby initiate a beneficial cascading effect throughout the system. Findings from the present study suggest that mothers' and fathers' emotion socialization behaviors are predicted by their personal beliefs and attitudes about emotion, suggesting that addressing these core cognitions may be pivotal to intervention efforts. Indeed, Gottman and colleagues (1997) outlined and initiated an intervention specifically focused upon parental emotion-coaching attitudes and behaviors, though empirical information regarding the efficacy of this work appears unavailable. Exploration of parents' attitudes toward emotion would benefit from a better understanding of how these belief systems are formed, and more research is needed in this area. For example, studies have linked mothers' emotion-related attitudes to aspects of their own development (Baker & Crnic, 2005; DeOliveira, Moran, & Pederson, 2005).

Limitations and Future Directions

This study has several methodological strengths. The use of latent variable structural equation modeling allowed us to address novel questions related to the commonality among emotion-socialization behaviors and to examine the overall structure of beliefs, behaviors, and child factors. The possible influence of shared-informant variance was substantially reduced by the contribution of an observational measure to the latent variable, and by the use of multiple informants and child interview in the child social competence composite. Findings further support the validity of the MESQ and provide considerable evidence for its utility with fathers. The observational system for rating parental emotion-coaching during discussion exhibited acceptable internal and inter-rater reliability, and validity was demonstrated with other emotion socialization behaviors and with child competence for fathers. Although mothers' emotion-coaching attitudes were associated with observed coaching during discussion, the overall lack of coherence among socialization behaviors suggests that some modifications to the observational system may be beneficial for use with mothers. Future studies should consider counterbalancing the order of mother and father discussions, as it is possible that maternal discussion ratings were less associated with other factors due to the children having already engaged in this task with their fathers immediately beforehand.

Although it was not an objective of the current study to address causality, model testing favored a pathway of prediction from child characteristics to parent behavior. As mentioned,

it is possible that parent emotion-socialization behavior at any particular time-point might be heavily influenced by children's ability to regulate and to participate in the exchange (Katz et al., 1996), and that parenting may exert its influence in more subtle ways over time. However, a more comprehensive understanding of the structure of emotion socialization would be facilitated by use of a longitudinal design (Denham et al., 2007). Considerable effort was made to reduce the potential for shared informant variance to influence the findings. Nevertheless, future studies examining multiple emotion socialization behaviors through both report and observation would be helpful (Denham & Kochanoff, 2002). In a similar vein, the present study provided some insight into couple dynamics related to emotion socialization, but future studies incorporating family-systems approaches (e.g., McElwain et al., 2007) would enhance conceptualization of these complex processes. Although consistency in the measurement of emotion-socialization attitudes and behaviors across mothers and fathers was helpful for gender comparisons, qualitative differences in emotion socialization by mothers and fathers are possible, which would necessitate adaptation of measures across gender. Information on parents' self-expressiveness was not available for the present study, so replication with measurement of this construct would be helpful. Finally, although our sample was more ethnically diverse than many studies in this area, culture is inextricably tied to emotion socialization (Cole & Tan, 2007), and this topic deserves further attention. Despite these limitations, the current study provides valuable information about the structure of emotion socialization behaviors in mothers and fathers and sheds light on predictors and correlates of an underlying emotion-coaching behavioral style—findings with important implications for intervention efforts aimed at improving emotion-related parenting.

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Figure 1.
 Latent-variable structural equation model of relations for fathers and mothers. Dotted lines indicate non-significant pathways.
 *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

Table 1

Correlations among Measured Variables of Interest, by Parent Gender.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Coaching Attitudes Subscale	--	.03	.68**	.51***	-.24*	.47***	.03	.40***	.09	-.05	.15	.06
2. Dismissing Attitudes Subscale	.12	--	-.70***	-.08	.35**	-.25*	-.09	-.03	-.12	.08	-.12	.31**
3. Overall Coaching Attitudes	.57***	-.75***	--	.43***	-.43***	.52***	.07	.27**	.15	-.09	.15	-.16
4. Supportive Reactions Subscale	.47***	.15	.19†	--	-.37***	.85***	-.03	.40***	.16	-.10	.16	.21†
5. Unsupportive Reactions Subscale	.00	.23*	-.19†	.00	--	-.81***	.27**	-.16	-.22†	.15	-.21†	-.02
6. Overall Coaching Reactions	.37***	-.02	.26*	.78***	-.63***	--	-.18	.25*	.22†	-.15	.23*	.18
7. Negative Expressiveness	.10	.16	-.07	.02	.24*	-.16	--	.19	-.02	.03	-.03	-.06
8. Positive Expressiveness	.28**	-.14	.21*	.38***	-.22*	.34**	-.03	--	.30*	-.14	.29*	.21†
9. Coaching in Discussion Subscale	.07	-.25*	.25*	.13	-.13	.18†	-.05	.22**	--	-.53***	.88***	.20†
10. Dismissing in Discussion Subscale	-.13	.12	-.19†	-.04	-.04	-.01	.10	.03	-.47***	--	-.76***	-.10
11. Overall Coaching in Discussion	.11	-.22*	.26*	.10	-.06	.12	-.08	.08	.88***	-.83***	--	.24*
12. Child Composite	.05	-.23*	.22*	.03	-.01	.10	-.09	.19†	.02	.07	.11	--

 $p < .001$,**
 $p < .01$,*
 $p < .05$,†
 $p < .10$.

Note: Correlations in the lower left of the table are for mothers and those in the upper right are for fathers. Bolded variables represent variables used in the models and bolded correlations represent associations relevant to the predicted models.

Table 2

Descriptive Data for Mothers and Fathers, Parent Gender Differences, and Concordance within Couples.

Variable	Mother		Father		Difference	Concordance
	Mean	(SD)	Mean	(SD)	(<i>t</i>)	(<i>r</i>)
Coaching Attitudes Subscale	25.78	(3.48)	24.80	(4.05)	2.76**	.30*
Dismissing Attitudes Subscale	22.39	(4.32)	23.20	(4.23)	1.57	.22 [†]
Overall Coaching Attitudes	3.39	(5.22)	1.60	(5.75)	3.39**	.36**
Supportive Reactions Subscale	5.20	(.74)	4.80	(.80)	4.09***	.16
Unsupportive Reactions Subscale	2.43	(.60)	2.65	(.71)	2.19*	.01
Overall Coaching Reactions	2.76	(.95)	2.13	(.92)	4.29***	.09
Negative Expressiveness	3.40	(.77)	3.09	(.74)	2.69**	.03
Positive Expressiveness	5.39	(.76)	4.98	(.95)	4.21***	.21[†]
Coaching during Discussion Subscale	3.32	(.77)	3.31	(.74)	.24	.27*
Dismissing during Discussion Subscale	1.59	(.65)	1.40	(.58)	2.65*	.32**
Overall Coaching during Discussion	1.72	(1.22)	1.90	(1.18)	1.13	.35*

 $p < .001$,**
 $p < .01$,*
 $p < .05$,[†]
 $p < .10$.

Note: The above descriptive data are for the entire sample of mothers ($n = 88$). However, gender comparisons and associations included only mothers with participating partners ($n = 76$) and the means and standard deviations (SD) for their overall scores were as follows: Attitudes = 4.07 (5.17), Reactions = 2.89 (.92), Positive Expressiveness = 55.11 (6.41), and Discussion = 1.72 (1.21). Final variables used in the models are bolded.