Published in final edited form as:

J Fam Stud. 2015 March 1; 21(2): 144–162. doi:10.1080/13229400.2015.1020982.

Emotion Socialization Practices in Latina and European American Mothers of Preschoolers with Behavior Problems

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Abstract

The present study examined mothers' emotion socialization of 3-year-old children with behavior problems, to determine whether emotion socialization practices, as well as the relation between these practices and child functioning, varied across ethnicities. Participants were 134 preschoolers with behavior problems. Mothers were European American ($n = 96$) and Latina American ($n = 38$; predominately Puerto Rican). Audiotaped mother-child interactions were coded for emotion socialization behaviors. Latina and European American mothers used similar emotion socialization practices on most dimensions. Latina mothers were more likely to minimize or not respond to their children's negative affect. However, this difference did not appear to have ramifications for children. This study provided evidence for both differences and similarities across ethnicities on emotion socialization practices.

Keywords

culture; emotion socialization; emotion regulation; parenting; preschoolers

Emotion regulation is a process that entails monitoring, assessing, and adjusting personal reactions to emotions (Cole, Martin, & Dennis, 2004) and is guided by parents beginning early in childhood through emotion socialization (Cole, Dennis, Smith-Simon, & Cohen, 2009). The preschool years have been identified as a period in which substantial learning around emotion and emotion regulation strategies occurs that likely has significant implications for long term emotional competence (Cole et al., 2009). Because socialization occurs in a cultural context, and different cultures have different standards for emotional expression, it is likely that the emotion socialization of preschool children is affected by culture (e.g., Matsumoto, Yoo, & Nakagawa, 2008). However, the vast majority of research on emotion socialization has been conducted with European American parents. Research is needed to build on the relatively small body of research (e.g., Berlin, Brooks-Gunn, Spiker,

& Zaslow, 1995; Bradley, Corwyn, Pipes, McAdoo, & García Coll, 2001; Ispa et al., 2004) that has examined emotion socialization in different ethnic groups, with a particular need to better understand emotion socialization among Latino parents (Li-Grining, 2012; Perez Rivera, & Dunsmore, 2011).

Emotion Socialization

Three main emotion socialization behaviors have been identified in parents: (a) expression of emotions, (b) discussion of emotion, and (c) reaction to children's emotion (Eisenberg, Cumberland, & Spinrad, 1998). Parental expressivity of emotions is thought to assist children's learning of appropriate emotional expressions and to influence children's appraisal of their emotional experiences (Dunsmore & Halberstadt, 1997). It is believed that parental discussion of emotion contributes to children's emotional and social competence (Eisenberg et al., 1998). For example, children who grow up in families in which adults frequently discuss emotional experiences have been found to be better able to control experienced negative affect (Kopp, 1992). Finally, how parents respond to children's emotions can either assist them in regulating arousal or contribute to emotional overarousal. Non-supportive reactions to children's negative emotions have been related to worse social and emotional outcomes for the children (Eisenberg, Fabes, & Murphy, 1996; Tao, Zhou, & Wang, 2010). These reactions include punitive, distressed, and minimizing reactions (e.g., parent minimizes the seriousness of the situation and/or devalues the child's problem or negative affect). On the other hand, supportive reactions have been related to better outcomes for children and better quality parent-child relationships (Thompson, 1998). Supportive reactions include parental reactions that are encouraging of the expression of emotion, focus on assuaging the negative emotion, or on solving the problem that is causing distress. More recently, researchers have identified additional strategies as potentially important for emotion socialization across other cultures (Friedlmeier, Corapci, & Cole, 2011). Some of these responses are aimed at coaching children on appropriate emotional expression by discussing the causes, effects, or consequences of the emotional expression using practices such as response training, reflection-enhancing, and teaching. Other responses have been identified as parental attempts to promote relational emotion competence by discouraging the expression of negative affect. These include teaching children about the unacceptability of emotional expression and ignoring-reasoning-nurturance responses.

Culture and Parental Socialization of Emotions

Socialization always occurs in a context (Bornstein et al., 1992), so the experience, meaning, and expression of emotions are likely influenced by the sociocultural context in which they exist (Matsumoto et al., 2008; Mesquita, 2007; Wu et al., 2002). *Culture* refers to shared beliefs, values, and customs that are transmitted intergenerationally (Cole & Tan, 2007). Because people from different cultures vary in their standards for conduct, emotional behavior may be affected by these standards (Durgel, Leyendecker, Yagmurlu, & Harwood, 2009; Harwood, Schoelmerich, Schulze, & Gonzalez, 1999). Although there are many aspects of culture that are shared across ethnic groups and there is great variability within

ethnic groups, the distinct cultural norms commonly shared by members of the same ethnicity are likely to result in distinct emotion socialization practices.

Broad cultural values of different ethnicities

Parents' practices and beliefs are likely to be determined by the broad set of values that are held by their culture (LeVine et al., 1994). Although not all individuals of the same ethnicity share the same views, considering commonly held broad values can provide a framework for understanding how culture impacts the socialization of emotions. For example, whereas the European American culture has consistently been described as individualistic (Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai, & Lucca, 1988), Latino cultures have been thought to have a more sociocentric, interdependent view. *Respeto* (proper demeanor) and *familismo* (sense of unity and admiration that guides family interactions) are also cultural beliefs common among Latino families that might impact parenting practices (Durik, et al., 2006; Harwood, Leyendecker, Carlson, Asencio, & Miller, 2002). This emphasis on respeto means that Latino parents often highly value child obedience and respect towards adults (Calzada, Fernandez, & Cortes, 2010). Consistent with these broad cultural values, Latina mothers' parenting styles have been described as hierarchical, characterized by strictness and control, yet responsive and not punitive (Bornstein et al., 2012). Finally, Latino culture is characterized by being less restrictive of the expression of affect than other cultures (Zayas, 1994; Zayas, & Solari, 1994), which will likely impact emotion socialization practices.

Ethnic differences in emotion socialization

A number of studies have examined parents' emotion expression across different ethnic groups (e.g., Jack, Garrod, Yu, Caldara, & Schyns, 2012; Matsumoto, & Hwang, 2011). A smaller body of research has documented ethnic differences in discussion of emotion. For example, Wang (2001) documented that when discussing emotions, American mothers were more likely to explain the emotions in question, whereas Chinese mothers were more likely to teach children about the appropriate expression of such emotions. Differences have also been documented in the degree to which negative emotion words are used in emotion conversations, as well as in the amount of discussion around disagreements over emotional displays between these two cultures (Fivush, & Wang, 2005). Relatively few studies have examined ethnic differences in reactions to child negative affect (Bornstein et al., 1992; Cole, Tamang, & Shretha, 2006; Keller & Otto, 2009; Raval & Martini, 2009), but they suggest that parents from different cultures differ in the degree to which they exhibit different reactions to negative affect. For example, European American parents report using more supportive than unsupportive practices (Wong, McElwain, & Halberstadt, 2009), whereas Hong Kong and Chinese mothers report using both with similar frequency, and Indian mothers report using some supportive practices very rarely (Raval & Martini, 2009). Ethnic differences have also been evident in the types of reactions parents exhibit. For example, Hong Kong mothers have been found to respond to children's negative affect by discussing the causes and consequences of emotional displays (response training; Chan, Bowes, & Wyver, 2009); Tamang mothers have been documented as responding with a combination of ignoring and reasoning with the child (Cole et al, 2006); Japanese caregivers have been described as inducing empathy and reflection (Hayashi, Karasawa, & Tobin, 2009); and Indian mothers have been described as responding by communicating the

unacceptability of the emotional display and assisting the child in understanding the problem rather than attempting to find a solution for it (Raval & Martini, 2009).

Although a number of studies have compared Latina and European American mothers on parenting practices that may be related to emotion socialization, such as warmth (e.g., Domenech Rodríguez, Donovan, & Crowley, 2009; Ispa et al., 2004) and physical affection (Bradley et al., 2001), only a handful of studies have directly examined the emotion socialization practices of Latina mothers (Carlson & Harwood, 2003; Cervantes, 2002; Eisenberg, 1999; Flannagan & Perese, 1998). There is some evidence that Puerto Rican and European American mothers display similar levels of emotional expression with their infants (Carlson & Harwood, 2003). With respect to discussion of emotion, comparisons of Anglo American and Mexican American mothers have suggested that they do not differ in the frequency with which they discuss emotions (Eisenberg, 1999; Flannagan & Perese, 1998), but that there are ethnic differences in the nature of these discussions. Anglo American mothers were more likely than Mexican American mothers to make emotional references when discussing learning topics (Flannagan & Perese, 1998), and to talk more about the child's emotions than about the mother's and others' emotions (Eisenberg, 1999). There is also some evidence that discussion of emotion may depend on acculturation. Cervantes (2002) compared Mexican mothers who moved to the United States after age 12 to Mexican American mothers who were born in the United States and found that the former used more explanations than labels when discussing emotions, whereas the latter used similar levels of both (Cervantes, 2002). In summary, research suggests that culture influences the way in which parents discuss emotions with children. Unfortunately, few studies have examined the frequency of such discussion in naturalistic interactions, and little is known about two other important dimensions of emotion socialization among Latina mothers: emotion expression and reactions to negative affect.

Ethnic Differences in the Relation between Emotion Socialization and Child Outcome

Some researchers have suggested that ethnicity may impact the relation between parenting behaviors and child outcomes (Deater-Deckard & Dodge, 1997). It has been posited that children may ascribe different significance to parenting practices depending on several factors, such as how normative the practice is, the emotional context the behaviors transpire in, and children's understanding of their parents' motivations (Creveling, Varela, Weems, & Corey, 2010; Ispa et al., 2004). For example, studies have found that in African American families, children may benefit from high levels of parental control if there are also high levels of warmth within the family (McLoyd & Smith, 2002); however, in European American families, this may not hold true (Muris, 2006). Also, whereas physical discipline has been associated with behavior problems for European American children (Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, & Dornbusch, 1991), this relation has not been found for African American children (Deater-Deckard, Dodge, Bates, & Pettit, 1996). Although this literature has largely focused on African-American and European-American parents rather than Latino parents, these findings highlight the importance of examining parenting practices across ethnic groups.

Although ethnic differences in parenting practices and styles and their relation to child outcomes have received some attention, few studies have specifically explored ethnic differences in the relation between emotion socialization and child outcomes. The few studies that have done so have found that the same practice may be differently related to long-term child well-being (Corapci & Yagmurlu, 2008; Corapci, Yagmurlu, & Aksan, 2010; Tao et al., 2010). Although these studies have not included Latino families in their samples, they suggest that the impact of parental emotion socialization on children's emotional well-being may differ across cultures. There is some evidence that for Puerto Rican and European American mother-child dyads, the relation between emotion expression and children's attachment is similar (Carlson & Harwood, 2003); however, more research is needed.

Emotion Socialization in Children With Behavior Problems

Studying emotion socialization practices in parents of children with behavior problems is important. Children with behavior problems tend to have difficulty with emotion regulation (e.g., Supplee, Skuban, Shaw, & Prout, 2009), and may therefore be in particular need of interventions designed to foster emotion regulation. Helping parents use effective emotion socialization practices may be one such type of intervention. In fact, parenting programs that target parental emotion socialization have been successful in reducing emotion lability in children with behavior problems (Herbert, Harvey, Roberts, Wichowski, & Lugo-Candelas, 2013). To develop effective emotion socialization interventions for children with behavior problems that are culturally sensitive, it is critical to identify emotion socialization practices that are associated with positive child outcomes among children with behavior problems from different ethnic backgrounds. Extant literature has identified emotion socialization practices that are important for typically developing children. However, the process of emotion development may differ for children with behavior problems, and we can not assume that emotion socialization practices that are effective for typically developing children are also effective for children with behavior problems.

The Present Study

Given the importance of parental socialization of emotions for the development of children's emotion regulation, it is critical to better understand patterns of emotion socialization in different ethnic groups. The Latino population has significantly increased over the past few decades in the United States (Ennis, Ríos-Vargas, & Albert, 2011; Federal Interagency Forum on Child & Family Statistics, 2011), yet relatively little is known about the emotion socialization practices of Latino parents. The present study sought to better understand emotion socialization among Latina mothers by testing the following hypotheses:

1) Latina and European American mothers' will respond to children's expression of negative affect with more supportive than unsupportive responses

Parents' reactions to children's negative affect are thought to be critical to children's emotional development (Eisenberg, Fabes, Carlo, & Karbon, 1992). Evidence stemming from studies examining parent reports suggests that parents use more supportive than non-supportive reactions to children's negative affect (Eisenberg et al., 1996). Thus, we predicted that observational data would be reflective of parental reports and that for both

groups, mothers would be more likely to respond to children's expression of negative affect with supportive than with unsupportive reactions.

2) Due to differing cultural values around emotional expression, Latina and European American mothers will use different emotion socialization practices

Because culture is thought to affect emotion socialization, it was predicted that there would be ethnic differences in emotion expression and reactions to children's emotions. Because Latino culture is thought to be less restrictive of the expression of affect (Zayas, 1994) and hierarchical parenting emphasizes high warmth, we predicted that Latina mothers would be more expressive of emotions with their children than European American mothers. We also predicted that because hierarchical parenting is characterized by high parental control, Latina mothers would be less likely to appease and more likely to confront their children when they exhibited negative affect. It is unclear; however, the degree to which Latina mothers would minimize their children's negative affect. On the one hand, a less emotionally restrictive cultural background and hierarchical parenting would mean that Latina mothers would be less likely to minimize their children's expression of anger. On the other hand, Latino culture also highly values *respeto*, and hierarchical parenting emphasizes strictness. Thus, if mothers perceive children's display of negative affect as disrespectful, they may minimize it more than European American mothers. Therefore we have two competing hypothesis regarding minimizing practices: Latina mothers could either use more or less minimization than their European American counterparts.

3) Mother's emotion socialization practices will be differentially related to child functioning across cultures

Because supportive emotion socialization practices would be consistent with both European American and Latino cultural values, we predicted that supportive emotion socialization practices would be associated with better child outcomes for both groups. However, because Latino cultures tend to value obedience and respect for elders, minimizing and confronting negative affect may convey the message that an authority figure is displeased with the expression of emotion, and would be perceived by Latino children as a culturally appropriate socialization practice, rather than unsupportive. Thus, it was predicted that minimizing and confronting child negative affect would more likely be associated with poor child outcomes in European American families than in Latino families. Similarly, it was expected that appeasing child negative affect would be more likely to be associated with positive child outcomes in European American families than in Latino families, because appeasing negative affect might conflict with values of obedience and respect for authority in the Latino culture.

Method

Participants

Participants were drawn from a sample of 199 children and their mothers who took part in a longitudinal study aimed at understanding the early development of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder and oppositional defiant disorder. Children ($n = 134$) of Latina ($n = 38$; 35 Puerto Rican, 2 Dominican, and 1 Mexican) and European American ($n = 96$)

mothers who completed an audiotaped assessment of child behavior and presented with significant externalizing problems were included in the present study. Children (64 girls and 70 boys) were all between the ages of 36 and 47 months old at the time of initial screening and were 36 to 50 months ($M = 44.31$, $SD = 3.35$) at the time of the first home visit. Although Latino families were oversampled, more European American mothers participated than Latina mothers, reflecting the area's demographic distribution (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013).

Procedure

Participants were recruited by distributing screening questionnaire packets through state birth records, pediatrician offices, child care centers, and community centers throughout Western Massachusetts. Exclusion criteria were evidence of intellectual disability, deafness, blindness, language delay, cerebral palsy, epilepsy, autism, or psychosis. Inclusion criteria were: (a) parent responded "yes" or "possibly" to the question, "Are you concerned about your child's activity level, defiance, aggression, or impulse control?" and (b) Behavior Assessment System for Children – Parent Report Scale (BASC-PRS; Reynolds & Kamphaus, 1992) hyperactivity and/or aggression subscale T scores fell at or above 65 (approximately 92nd percentile). Eligible families were scheduled for two 3-hr home visits and each parent was paid \$200. Bilingual staff conducted home visits for Spanish-speaking families and the Spanish version of the BASC-PRS was administered. Written informed consent was obtained from all parents who participated. The study was conducted in compliance with the authors' Institutional Review Board and focused on data collected during the first year of the longitudinal study.

Measures

Demographic information—Parents provided basic demographic information including their income, race/ethnicity, years of education, age, and marital status.

Audiotaped assessment of emotion socialization—Parents were each asked to use a micro-cassette player to record a total of 2 hrs of interaction with their children, selecting times of day that tended to be challenging. An earlier review of the tapes suggested that 30 min of tape was sufficient for capturing a wide array of behavior that was representative of the entire 2 hrs, and thus the first 30 min of the interaction was coded for all families. All parents completed at least 30 min. Each tape was coded by two coders independently and scores were averaged. Adequate reliability (intraclass correlations $> .61$) was reached for all codes. Coders were undergraduate students who identified themselves as European American ($n = 14$), Asian American ($n = 1$), Latino ($n = 2$), and African American ($n = 2$). Coders were not informed of the participants' ethnicity or the purpose of this study.

The coding system was developed to capture verbal emotion expression, discussion of emotion, and reactions to child negative affect. A copy of the coding system can be obtained from the second author. Several of the reactions to child negative affect codes were derived from existing self-report (Fabes, Eisenberg & Bernzweig, 1990) and observational (Denham, Mitchell-Copeland, Strandberg, Auerbach, & Blair, 1997) emotion socialization measures, and included distress, punitive, minimizing, expressive encouragement, emotion-focused

reactions and problem-focused reactions. The remaining codes were derived inductively after reviewing a random sample of audiotapes and are consistent with other emotion socialization dimensions identified in the literature (Friedlmeier et al., 2011). Global ratings were made every 5 min to indicate the frequency with which the variable was observed and rated on a scale from 1 to 7 (1 = no instances, 3 = sometimes, 5 = often, 7 = very often). Frequency scores were averaged across all epochs to calculate a total frequency score for each code for each participant. Verbal emotion expression consisted of two codes: *positive affect* and *negative affect*. Discussion of emotion was assessed by coding *emotion talk*, defined as the use of emotion language to express one's own feelings or talk about feelings of others. Parental reactions to children's negative affect were rated using 14 dimensions (described in Table 1) if a child expressed negative affect during the 5 min interval. A principal components factor analyses was conducted on these 14 dimensions using the entire sample of mothers and yielded four factors: Confronting (consisting of *distress*, *punitive*, *limit-setting*, and *arguing*), Minimizing/Ignoring (consisting of *dismiss/minimizing* and *no response*), Supportive (consisting of *expressive encouragement*, *emotion-focused*, and *problem-focused* reactions), and Appeasing/Discussing (consisting of *compromising*, *giving in*, and *reasoning/clarifying*). *Positive thinking* and *redirection* did not load on any factor so they were not included in analyses (factor loadings are presented in Table 2). The principal components factor analysis was used to guide the decision of how many factors to create and where to place variables. However, in two instances (*parental reasoning/clarifying* and *problem-focused*) the variable was placed on the factor with the second-highest factor loading because it was more consistent with theory and was very close in value to the highest factor loading. The four factor solution explained 59.37% of the total variance. For data reduction purposes, parental reactions to negative affect variables were averaged to create four variables based on this factor structure. Child negative affect and positive affect were also rated on the same global scale every 5 min.

Audiotaped interactions were chosen to assess emotion socialization because they have several advantages over parent-report and videotaped interactions. First, compared to parent-report, audiotapes provide a more objective assessment of parenting practices and are less subject to parental bias. Second, compared to videotapes, we have found that audiotapes tend to elicit less reactivity, something that is crucial given our interest in exploring maternal reactions to negative affect during conflict-ridden interactions. In fact, videotaped interactions were collected as part of the larger study, but contained too little negative affect to warrant coding reactions to negative affect. Finally, audiotapes are less likely to be affected by coders' biases than videotape because coders could remain less aware of the parent's ethnicity. The primary disadvantage of audiotaped interactions is that only verbal emotion socialization practices could be assessed; non-verbal behaviors could not be coded. However, although non-verbal emotion socialization is clearly important, much of emotion socialization involves verbal practices; for example, the vast majority of items on one of the most widely used parent-report measures of emotion socialization (Fabes, et al, 1990) focus on verbal parenting behaviors. In sum, although the use of audiotapes limited our ability to capture non-verbal emotion socialization strategies, this limitation seems to be far outweighed by their advantage in providing a less intrusive and more naturalistic assessment of parent-child interactions.

BASC-Parent Rating Scale (PRS)—This scale assesses a broad range of psychopathology in children and was administered to mothers. *T* scores (based on general, not gender-specific, norms) for the externalizing subscale were used. This subscale has demonstrated good reliability for 2- to 3-year-old children (Reynolds & Kamphaus, 1992).

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Latina and European American mothers were first compared on demographic variables using one-way ANOVAs and chi-square tests. Significant differences between Latina and European American mothers were found for years of education, $F(1, 132) = 36.08, p < .001$. European American mothers ($M = 14.33, SD = 2.44$) had more years of education than Latina mothers ($M = 11.53, SD = 2.42$). Differences in mothers' marital status also emerged, $\chi^2(1) = 32.72, p < .001$, with Latina mothers ($n = 15, 39\%$ married) reporting being married or partnered less than their European American counterparts ($n = 81, 84\%$ married). There were no significant differences in child age, $F(1, 132) = 0.39, p = .54$. Significant ethnic differences were found for children's BASC- PRS externalizing scores, $F(1, 132) = 8.17, p = .005$, with Latino children ($M = 66.61, SD = 13.41$) being rated by their mothers as having more externalizing problems than European American children ($M = 60.57, SD = 9.92$). Ethnic differences in child expression of positive and negative affect were also examined. Analyses revealed that, even when controlling for mother-rated child externalizing problems and mother's education, Latino children ($M = 2.44, SD = 0.14$) were rated as displaying significantly more negative affect than European American children ($M = 1.66, SD = 0.08$), $F(1, 130) = 19.83, p < .01$. No differences were found for child expression of positive affect.

Patterns of Emotion Socialization Practices

To examine the relative frequency of different emotion socialization practices, a series of repeated measures analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) were conducted. First, to compare the verbal expression of positive and negative affect, parental affect expression (positive vs. negative) was entered as a within-subjects factor, mothers' ethnicity (Latina vs. European American) was entered as a between-subjects factor, and mothers' years of education and child externalizing symptoms were entered as covariates. Education was controlled for because ethnicity has been found to be highly confounded with social class (Leyendecker, Harwood, Comparini, & Yalçinkaya, 2005) and because social class may be associated with emotion socialization (Martini, Root, & Jenkins, 2004). This analysis revealed a significant interaction between mothers' verbal expression of affect and ethnicity, $F(1, 130) = 4.66, p = .03$. To better understand this interaction, a repeated measures ANCOVA was conducted for each ethnic group separately, with parent affect as the within-subjects factor and years of education and child externalizing symptoms as covariates. Follow-up analyses yielded significant differences for European American mothers, $F(1, 95) = 74.68, p < .001$, with European American mothers demonstrating more positive ($M = 3.04, SD = 1.03$) than negative ($M = 1.75, SD = 0.81$) affect. No significant differences were found for Latina mothers, $F(1, 37) = 0.19, p = .66$, who displayed similar levels of positive ($M = 2.40, SD = 1.14$) and negative ($M = 2.27, SD = 0.89$) affect. Mothers' engagement in discussions about

emotions was also examined by conducting a univariate ANCOVA with ethnicity as a between-subjects factor and mother's years of education and children externalizing symptoms as covariates. Interestingly, both European American ($M = 1.07$, $SD = 0.10$) and Latina mothers ($M = 1.08$, $SD = 0.16$) were rated as infrequently discussing emotions with their children and the analysis did not yield significant differences, $F(1, 130) = 0.13$, $p = .72$.

An ANCOVA was also conducted to compare the frequency with which mothers employed different responses to child negative affect. Ethnicity was entered as a between-subjects factor and reactions to child negative affect was the within-subjects factor. This analysis revealed a significant interaction between mothers' reactions to child negative affect (confronting, minimizing/ignoring, supportive, and appeasing/discussing) and Ethnicity, $F(3, 342) = 7.42$, $p < .001$. Follow-up analysis did not reveal significant differences in strategy use for European American mothers, $F(3, 240) = 1.82$, $p = .15$. However, within-subjects contrasts revealed that European American mothers used significantly more minimizing/ignoring ($M = 1.30$, $SD = 0.24$) than appeasing/discussing ($M = 1.22$, $SD = 0.22$) responses, $F(1, 80) = 5.80$, $p = .02$. For Latina mothers, a significant main effect of reactions to child negative affect was documented, $F(3, 108) = 18.71$, $p < .001$. Follow-up contrasts revealed that Latina mothers engaged in significantly more confronting ($M = 1.27$, $SD = 0.21$) and minimizing/ignoring ($M = 1.63$, $SD = 0.57$) than appeasing/discussing reactions ($M = 1.18$, $SD = 0.16$), $F(1, 36) = 5.25$, $p = .03$, and $F(1, 36) = 23.83$, $p < .001$, respectively. Additionally, Latina mothers engaged in more minimizing/ignoring than supportive reactions ($M = 1.20$, $SD = 0.16$), $F(1, 36) = 20.10$, $p < .001$.

Ethnic Differences in Parental Emotion Socialization Practices

To examine ethnic differences in the frequency of each emotion socialization practice, one-way ANCOVAs were conducted, with mothers' ethnicity as a between subjects factor. Child-externalizing symptoms and mothers' years of education were entered as covariates to control for child psychopathology and mothers' SES. Results are presented in Table 3. The only significant ethnic difference was in mothers' use of minimizing/ignoring reactions. Latina mothers were rated as more likely to respond to their children's expression of emotion by minimizing or not responding to it, $F(1, 119) = 9.87$, $p = .002$. Because reactions were only coded when children displayed negative affect, this difference could not have been merely an artifact of the fact that Latino children in this sample exhibited more frequent negative affect.

Does the Relation Between Emotion Socialization Practices and Child Outcome Vary as a Function of Ethnicity?

To examine whether there were ethnic differences in the relation between emotion socialization and child functioning, correlations were computed between these variables separately for each ethnic group and compared across groups. Because rates of discussion of emotion were so low, this variable was not included in these analyses. Intercorrelations are presented in Table 4.

Mothers' confronting reactions were associated with higher externalizing scores and supportive reactions were associated with lower externalizing scores for European American children, but not for Latino children; however, the relations were not significantly different from each other, $z = 1.35$, $p = .16$, and $z = -.73$, $p = .47$, respectively. Mothers' minimizing/ignoring reactions were also associated with more externalizing problems for European American children at a probability level that approached statistical significance, but again this relation was not significantly different from the relation for Latino children, $z = .45$, $p = .65$. The relations between appeasing/discussing reactions and externalizing problems were not significant for either group; the relation for European American children differed from that of Latino children, at a probability level that approached significance, $z = 1.22$, $p = .22$. The relation for European American children was positive, whereas the one for Latino children was negative.

Discussion

The goal of the present study was to examine emotion socialization practices among Latina and European American mothers. This study provides evidence for both differences and similarities across ethnicities in emotion socialization practices and their correlates.

Patterns of Emotion Socialization Across Ethnic Groups

Although parents in our sample were instructed to record their interactions at challenging times of the day, mothers and children displayed high levels of positive affect, even in potentially problematic and conflict-ridden interactions. In addition, this study suggests that although verbal expression of affect is common among mothers and their preschool children, conversations about experienced emotions are relatively uncommon in naturalistic settings. When children expressed affect, the most common response from both Latina and European American mothers was to minimize or ignore the affect. Confronting (parental distress, arguing, limit setting, and punitive reactions), appeasing/discussing (compromising, reasoning/clarifying, and giving in to the child), and supportive reactions (expressive encouragement, emotion-focused, and problem-focused reactions) generally occurred with similar frequency, although confronting was somewhat more common than appeasing/discussing or supportive reactions among Latina mothers.

As a way of providing contextual information for possible ethnic differences in emotion socialization, we explored ethnic differences in child emotion expressivity and found that Latino children were more likely to express negative affect, even when controlling for mother-reported child externalizing problems. This may be a result of cultural norms that are less restrictive of the expression of negative affect (Zayas, 1994; Zayas, & Solari, 1994) or may be due to a greater emphasis on interdependence in Latino cultures (Harwood et al., 2002), which might promote emotional regulation strategies such as sharing one's emotions with others.

Ethnic Differences in the Use of Emotion Socialization Practices

There was no evidence of ethnic differences in mothers' verbal expression of positive or negative affect when controlling for social class and child externalizing symptoms, although

European American mothers showed a greater difference between positive and negative affect than did Latina mothers. In addition, mothers generally responded to negative affect in similar ways. However, there was one noteworthy difference. Latina mothers were more likely to minimize or not respond to negative affect. Latina mothers' minimization and ignoring of child negative affect may be a direct result of the greater expression of negative affect among Latino children in this sample, and might not carry the discouraging connotations that have been attributed to these practices in the literature (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1994; Eisenberg et al., 1992). If a child is frequently expressing negative affect, parents may naturally be more selective in when to respond to it. Not responding to or minimizing some expressions of negative affect may be a means of socializing children regarding what are and what are not important instances in which negative affect should be shared with others. Alternatively, children's heightened verbal expression of negative affect might be a reaction to mothers' lack of responses, and may serve as a means of seeking additional attention. Further research is needed to better understand both the direction of this finding and the cultural values that may underlie this difference.

Differential Relations Between Practices and Outcomes Across Ethnic Groups

The one ethnic difference that was observed in emotion socialization (Latina mothers' greater use of minimization) did not appear to have ramifications for children. Although Latina mothers tended to minimize or ignore negative affect, this practice was not related to worse child functioning for Latino children. Although the small sample size for Latina mothers and resulting lower power could have accounted for the absence of a relation between minimizing/ignoring and child functioning, the effect size was sufficiently small that it seems unlikely that there is a truly meaningful relation. Again, the lack of negative consequence for Latina mothers' use of minimizing reactions suggests that children might not be interpreting this practice as dismissing of their emotional experience, but rather as mothers' attempt to teach children which emotional experiences should be expressed.

The relations between appeasing/discussing reactions and externalizing problems were in the opposite direction for European American and Latino children. Although neither relation was significantly different from zero, appeasing/discussing reactions were associated with slightly more externalizing problems in European-American children and fewer externalizing problems in Latino children. It may be that in the context of an interdependent culture and strict parenting, a mother's use of compromising, discussing, and negotiating negative experiences with the child maintains a sense of warmth, communication, and responsiveness within the dyad, and is thus not harmful for children's emotional development. These findings provide preliminary support for the notion that some parenting techniques and styles are context bound constructs and the extent to which they are detrimental to child functioning may depend on how normative they are within a cultural context.

Even when mothers of different ethnicities used similar emotion socialization practices, there was some preliminary support for differences in the degree to which these related to current child functioning, though these differences did not reach significance. For the European American sample only, less use of supportive reactions (expressive

encouragement, emotion-focused, and problem-focused reactions) and greater use of confronting reactions (parental distress, arguing, limit setting, and punitive reactions) were related to externalizing problems. Although these relations were in the same direction for Latina mothers and were not significantly different than relations for European Americans, the effect sizes for Latina were small, suggesting that even with sufficient power, the relations would likely not be clinically significant. However, larger studies may be needed to detect ethnic differences in the relations between emotion socialization and child functioning.

Limitations

These findings should be interpreted in the context of a number of limitations. First, our small sample size of Latina mothers might have limited our ability to detect significant differences and effects. Similarly, because our ethnic groups varied in size, we may have been more likely to find relations between emotion socialization practices and child functioning for the European American sample. Third, the use of audiotaped interactions has both advantages and disadvantages. Audiotapes allowed us to directly listen to parent-child interactions and potentially elicit less reactivity than videotapes. However, they only provide a limited sample of parenting, are limited in assessing nonverbal socialization practices, and mothers' knowledge of being recorded may have affected parenting. Fourth, although coders were not informed of the participants' ethnicities, they could have made assumptions based on the audio recording, and any biases they may have had could have affected the results. Finally, although this study provides some insight into cultural differences in emotion socialization, it is important to remember that ethnicity was employed as a proxy for culture. It is crucial that research further explore the meaning of culture by more directly assessing the specific variables that likely underlie these differences.

Implications and Future Directions

This study suggests that a revision may be needed in how the field conceptualizes emotion socialization practices. Researchers have used the terms *unsupportive reaction* to describe parental reactions to emotions such as minimizing reactions, and have called reactions such as emotion focused reactions *supportive* (Eisenberg et al., 1998; McElwain, Halberstadt, & Volling, 2007). Because terms such as *supportive* and *non-supportive* are value-laden, it may be advisable to develop more descriptive terminology. If the same behavior can be used for achieving different goals, interpreted in different ways by the child, and have different associated outcomes, the supportive or non-supportive nature of each behavior is relative to its cultural context. Furthermore, because emotion socialization goals may have been assumed to remain constant across cultures, the repertoire of emotion socialization practices assessed by current coding schemas and self-reports may be so limited to one specific cultural context that they may be missing a host of emotion socialization practices used in other cultures. Future studies should explore emotion socialization practices in other cultures that have received less attention as well as the accompanying cultural values regarding emotion expression.

Acknowledgments

This research was supported by a grant from the National Institutes of Health (MH60132) awarded to the second author.

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Table 1

Description of the Emotion Socialization Variables

Emotion Socialization	Description of code
Parent verbal negative affect	Irritation, frustration, annoyance, sadness, or anger
Child verbal negative affect	Distressed, frustrated, angry, hostile, sad; demonstrates unhappiness/displeasure
Parent verbal positive affect	Happiness, joy, excitement, satisfaction, pleasure, or contentment
Child verbal positive affect	Happiness, joy, excitement, satisfaction, pleasure, or contentment
Parent discussion of emotion	Uses emotion language to express own feelings or talk about feelings of others
Child discussion of emotion	Uses emotion language to express own feelings or talk about feelings of others
Distress reactions	Parent is upset in response to the child's negative affect (e.g., anger, frustration, annoyance)
Punitive reactions	Parent punishes or threatens to punish child for expressing negative emotion
Expressive encouragement	Parent encourages expression of negative affect or validates the negative emotional state
Emotion-focused reactions	Parent helps child feel better, without minimizing the emotion (e.g., hugging, soothing)
Limit-setting reactions	Parent sets limit by telling child he/she can't have/do something or has to do something
Problem-focused reactions	Parent tries to solve the problem that is causing the child's distress (e.g., mends a broken toy)
Minimizing/discouraging reactions	Parent minimizes seriousness of the situation, devalues the problem or negative affect, scolds child for expression or tells the child to stop expressing affect
Positive thinking reactions	Parent tries to focus on the positive aspect of an event that occurred and helps child change perspective
Parental compromises	Parent tries to resolve issue upsetting the child by meeting the child's requests at a middle point
Parent "gives in"	Parent gives in to the child's requests/wishes in order to assuage child negative affect
Parent argues	Parent responds by getting into an argument with the child about the problem that the child is upset about
Parental reasoning/clarifying	Parent responds using reasoning or by working together with the child to clear up a misunderstanding
Parental redirection	Parent redirects the child's attention in order to assuage child's distress
Parent does not respond	Parent does not respond and ignores the expression of affect (does not imply ignoring child)

Table 2
Factor Loadings Based on a Principal Components Analysis for Mothers' Reactions to Child Negative Affect

	Confronting	Appeasing/ discussing	Minimizing/ ignoring	Supportive
Distress reactions	0.81	-0.21	0.03	0.20
Parent argues	0.66	0.08	-0.52	0.18
Punitive reactions	0.63	0.24	-0.42	0.23
Limit setting	0.73	0.15	0.12	-0.07
Parental compromises	0.16	0.58	-0.05	-0.46
Parent "gives in"	0.11	0.49	0.30	-0.44
Reasoning/clarifying	0.35	0.39	0.43	-0.24
Minimizing/discouraging reactions	0.44	-0.21	0.57	0.25
Parent does not respond	0.27	-0.45	0.59	-0.02
Expressive encouragement	-0.23	0.46	0.21	0.47
Emotion-focused reactions	-0.19	0.31	0.17	0.59
Problem-focused reactions	-0.09	0.47	0.16	0.45
Percentage of variance explained	21.29	13.59	12.58	11.91

Note: Factor loadings in boldface indicate they were placed on to the designated factor.

Table 3

Ethnic Differences in Parental Emotion Socialization Practices

Emotion Socialization Variable	European American Marginal Mean (SE)	Latina American Marginal Mean (SE)	F	p	Partial η^2
Parent verbal negative affect	1.75 (0.81)	2.27 (0.89)	2.29	.13	0.02
Parent verbal positive affect	3.03 (1.03)	2.40 (1.14)	3.70	.06	0.02
Confronting reactions	1.27 (0.03)	1.20 (0.04)	1.58	.21	0.01
Appeasing/discussing reactions	1.22 (0.02)	1.17 (0.04)	1.08	.30	0.01
Minimizing/ignoring reactions	1.32 (0.04)	1.59 (0.07)	9.87**	.01	0.08
Supportive reactions	1.23 (0.02)	1.21 (0.04)	0.27	.60	0.02

Note. Sample sizes for expression and discussion of emotion: $n = 96$ (European American) and $n = 38$ (Latina American). Sample sizes for reactions to negative affect: $n = 83$ (European American) and $n = 37$ (Latina American).

Table 4

Relations Between Emotion Socialization Practices and Child Externalizing Problems for European American and Latina American Mothers

Emotion socialization	Mother's ethnicity	Externalizing problems <i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
Parent verbal negative affect	European American	0.10	.33
	Latina American	0.18	.29
Parent verbal positive affect	European American	−0.01	.94
	Latina American	−0.14	.39
Confronting reactions	European American	0.43	.001
	Latina American	0.19	.27
Appeasing/discussing reactions	European American	0.14 ¹	.20
	Latina American	−0.21 ¹	.22
Minimizing/ignoring reactions	European American	0.19	.10
	Latina American	0.10	.56
Supportive reactions	European American	−0.23	.04
	Latina American	−0.09	.60

Note. Sample sizes for expression of emotion: $n = 96$ (European American) and $n = 38$ (Latina American). Sample sizes for reactions to negative affect: $n = 83$ (European American) and $n = 37$ (Latina American). Correlations with the same footnote are different from each other at a level that approaches significance ($p = .08$)