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# 3

## Gender Differences in the Socialization of Preschoolers' Emotional Competence

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### Abstract

*Preschoolers' socialization of emotion and its contribution to emotional competence is likely to be highly gendered. In their work, the authors have found that mothers often take on the role of emotional gatekeeper in the family, and fathers act as loving playmates, but that parents' styles of socialization of emotion do not usually differ for sons and daughters. They also found several themes in the prediction of preschoolers' emotion knowledge and regulation. For example, sometimes mother–father differences in emotional style actually seem to promote such competence, and girls seem particularly susceptible to parental socialization of emotion.* © Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

Preschool-aged children are increasingly required to meet self-regulatory and cognitive demands of preacademic learning. They also face many social hurdles entering the world of peers—communicating, expressing emotions in socially appropriate ways, reacting to difficult peers, building relationships. Emotional competence is vital in all these developmental tasks: Preschoolers who can regulate their expression and experience of various emotions are poised for far-reaching positive social, emotional, and academic outcomes (Cole, Teti, & Zahn-Waxler, 2003; Denham et al., 2003; Fantuzzo, Bulotsky-Shearer, Fusco, & McWayne, 2005; Miller et al., 2006; Trentacosta, Izard, Mostow, & Fine, 2006). Understanding their own and others' emotions also contributes strongly to their success.

Because emotional competence is so central to young children's success in many areas, we need to consider its promotion by important adults. It is the mission of this chapter, then, to examine more deeply the contributions of parental socialization to preschoolers' emotional competence. In particular, in concert with this volume's overarching topic, we focus on differences between and unique contributions of mothers and fathers. Although we are learning more and more about how parents' socialization of emotion generally promotes preschoolers' emotional competence, there is still much to learn about the crucial role of both parents' and children's gender (Brody, 1997; Brody & Hall, 1993).

Many factors help shape how mothers' and fathers' may differentially—at least some of the time—socialize emotions (see Chapter One). Following culturally approved gender roles, and operating in gender-specific contexts, mothers may be the carriers of the “emotional function” of the family, with fathers more likely filling playmate/disciplinarian roles (Bretherton, Lambert, & Golby, 2005; Garside & Klimes-Dougan, 2002; Lewis & Lamb, 2003). For example, we would expect mothers to express emotions that support relationship enhancement, such as shared joy, gratitude, and tenderness. In contrast, we would expect fathers to express more dominant emotions in service of assertive goals, such as anger (Chaplin, Cole, & Zahn-Waxler, 2005). Indeed, mothers are our “best bets” for shouldering the responsibility of the family's emotional gatekeeper. When compared to fathers, they are more intensely expressive of both positive and some negative emotions, more apt to experience a wider variety of emotions, and more accurate decoders of emotions. Such differences in emotions can really be considered gender roles.

Coupling these role expectations and functionally different emotional lives, we expect that mothers would indeed be very different socializers of emotions than fathers, with different contributions to their young children's emotional competence. At the same time, parents may socialize their sons' and daughters' emotional competence quite differently. For example, young boys and girls are encouraged to express the very gender-relevant emotions already noted for their mothers and fathers (Chaplin

et al., 2005; see also Chapter One). Complicating these already complex issues is the possibility that mothers and fathers may have their own ways to differentially socialize sons' and daughters' emotions. For example, fathers may respond particularly punitively to their sons' emotional outbursts, but not their daughters', with mothers treating their offspring more equally in this regard. Finally, mothers' and fathers' socialization of emotion may differentially contribute to children's emotional competence, and even these parent-specific contributions may be specific to sons or daughters. For example, if mothers do fill the role of family emotional gatekeeper, it could be that their teaching about emotions contributes more (or differently) to children's emotion knowledge than fathers'.

Following the central issues put forward in Chapter One, then, we focus in this chapter upon the role of fathers versus mothers in socializing their preschool-aged children's emotional competence. Knowing more about these differences and commonalities in mothers' and fathers' socialization, and about how these processes work together to promote positive outcomes, is crucial for both theoretical and applied considerations. For theory building we need to know two things. First, we need to know, do mothers' and fathers' means of socializing emotion differ according to dimensions explainable by existing gender theory? Second, we need to know whether each socialization factor, for each parent, adds to our ability to predict positive outcomes for young children. What aspects of socialization of emotion are most important, for which parent and which aspect of emotional competence? Does our theorizing "hold up" empirically? Applications of our findings could translate into parent training, tailored to mothers and fathers, to maximize children's emotional competence. Unique aspects of our chapter include our operationalization of socialization of emotion processes—we discuss the examination of both parents' observed and self-report emotional modeling, reactions to emotions, and teaching about emotions (Denham, Bassett, & Wyatt, 2007; Eisenberg, Cumberland, & Spinrad, 1998), and a comprehensive examination of emotional competence outcomes—that is both emotion knowledge and emotion regulation.

## Socialization of Emotion

**Current Framework and Findings.** Parents loom large as omnipresent contributors to young children's emerging emotional competence (Eisenberg et al., 1998). In Chapter One we discuss some of these techniques, but more detail is useful here. First, parents exhibit (or model) a variety of emotions, which children observe. Children's emotions often require some kind of reaction from parents, as well. Finally, parents' intentional teaching about the world of emotions is an important area of socialization. Each of these mechanisms influences children's emotion

knowledge and emotion regulation. Based on theory and empirical findings, we consider socialization of emotion “best practices” to include socializers’ positive emotional expression and experience, accepting and helpful reactions to preschoolers’ emotions, and emphasis on teaching about emotions, which in turn contribute to children’s more sophisticated emotional competence (for much more detail, see Denham, 2006; Denham et al., 2007).

Parents’ modeled emotions, whether relatively automatic or more conscious, can contribute to children’s understanding of emotions, either via their specific profile of expressed emotions or their general affective tone; positive expressiveness in the family promotes understanding of emotions, perhaps because it renders children more open to learning and problem solving (Fredrickson, 1998). Conversely, although exposure to well-regulated negative emotion can be positively related to understanding of emotion (Garner, Jones, & Miner, 1994), exposure to parents’ negative emotions often hampers young children’s emotion knowledge, perhaps via children’s avoiding distressing emotional issues.

Although similar pathways between parents’ emotions and young children’s emotion regulation can be envisioned, with children’s observation of more positive emotion profiles serving as models for regulatory processes, the literature on this aspect of socialization of emotional competence is scant. Moreover, viewing parental emotions is not the same as seeing their emotion regulation in action.

Parents’ supportive reactions to children’s emotions (Eisenberg, Fabes, & Murphy, 1996) may help the child in differentiating among emotions (Denham & Kochanoff, 2002; Denham, Zoller, & Couchoud, 1994; Eisenberg et al., 2001; Fabes, Poulin, Eisenberg, & Madden-Derdich, 2002). Such reactions may promote children’s readiness to learn about others’ emotions, with more punitive or distressed reactions to children’s emotions hampering their learning by rendering emotions a more “taboo,” sensitive, overly arousing topic. In the same vein, supportive responses to children’s emotions also are a supportive breeding ground for emotion regulation (Denham, 1989; Denham & Grout, 1993; Eisenberg et al., 2001).

In teaching about emotions, parents may draw attention to emotions and validate or clarify the child’s emotion, helping the child to express emotions authentically, in a regulated manner. The scaffolded context of chatting with a parent, especially mother, about emotional experience helps the young child to formulate a coherent body of knowledge about emotional expressions, situations, and causes (Denham & Kochanoff, 2002; Denham, Renwick-DeBardi, & Hewes, 1994; Denham et al., 1994; Dunn, Brown, & Beardsall, 1991; Dunn, Brown, Slomkowski, Tesla, & Youngblade, 1991; Dunn, Slomkowski, Donelan, & Herrera, 1995; Racine, Carpendale, & Turnbull, 2007). Talk about emotions also gives the child a new tool to use in the service of emotion regulation, allowing

them to separate impulses from behavior (Thompson, 1991), although the association between parental teaching and emotion regulation is understudied in families of preschoolers (see Shipman and others, 2007, for results with older children).

**Gender-Related Findings.** Thus, we are learning much about the ways in which parents socialize young children's emotional competence. However, examinations of gender-related issues surrounding this socialization and its contribution to preschoolers' emotional competence are much rarer. Some have been mentioned in Chapter One and elsewhere, but much more detail and interpretation regarding our population of interest—preschool-aged children—is warranted. What are the gender-differentiated findings about parents' modeling of, reactions to, and teaching about emotions?

Regarding modeling emotion, Garner and colleagues (Garner, Robertson, & Smith, 1997), for example, have found that mothers reported showing more positive emotion (especially to daughters) and more sadness around their children than fathers. Parents of sons, especially fathers, reported showing more anger. These findings echo our earlier theoretically based predictions. Moreover, fathers' positivity made an additional contribution, over and above mothers', to explained variance in children's ability to remain emotionally positive during a challenging peer play session; fathers' role as playmates may render their positivity important in partnership with mothers'.

Mothers are more supportive of, and fathers more punitive toward, their young children's emotions (Eisenberg et al., 1996; McElwain, Halberstadt, & Volling, 2007; Wong, McElwain, & Halberstadt, 2009). Eisenberg et al. (1996) also found that maternal, but not paternal, negative reactions to their gradeschoolers' emotions predicted the children's emotion regulation. Similarly, consistent with our "emotional gatekeeper" hypothesis, Denham and Kochanoff (2002) found that mothers' positive emotions and reactions to emotions predicted preschoolers' concurrent and later emotion knowledge much more often than fathers'. When fathers' concurrent positive emotions and reactions to child emotions did predict children's emotion knowledge, mothers' positive emotions and reactions made a *negative* contribution; it may be that children benefit when parents differ in their reactions to children's emotions (McElwain et al., 2007). In fact, children may learn much about emotions and their regulation when one parent or the other is more negatively expressive (within limits). We will return to both possibilities later.

Not all findings converge regarding parental differences in teaching about emotions, and fathers' emotion conversations are not as deeply studied as mothers'. Nonetheless, we can conclude that mothers talk more about emotions with their preschoolers than fathers do; parents talk more to daughters about emotions, especially specific ones such as sadness; and

mothers and fathers sometimes differ in their emotion talk to sons and daughters (Adams, Kuebli, Boyle, & Fivush, 1995; Fivush, 1991; Fivush et al., 2003; Fivush, Brotman, Buckner, & Goodman, 2000; Kuebli, Butler, & Fivush, 1995). Mothers appear to stress the interpersonal nature of emotions (Fivush, 1991; Flannagan & Perese, 1998), and fathers sometimes appear not to view family conversations as opportunities to discuss emotions at all (Chance & Fiese, 1999). Finally, in Denham and Kochanoff (2002), mothers' teaching about emotion contributed to preschoolers' emotion knowledge, but fathers' emotion talk actually made a *negative* contribution—they talked more about emotions to those children who especially needed to regulate their emotions. This finding in particular reminds us of the specific roles we propose for mothers and fathers—with mothers teaching about emotions in a more narrative fashion, and fathers using emotion language to serve a more directive function.

Taken together, however, these findings only begin to flesh out answers to our gender-focused questions on how parents socialize emotion. Given the gendered world of emotion, we must examine systematically the questions put forward earlier, to consider the socializers and the socialized—mothers and fathers, girls and boys. It is clear from the state of our knowledge that more detail buttressed by solid methodology is required to promote empirical understanding of our theoretical problems set up here: How do preschoolers' fathers and mothers differ in all three aspects of socialization of emotion, both overall and for sons and daughters? How does their socialization of emotion contribute to both understanding and regulation as aspects of their children's emotional competence, as a whole and for boys and girls separately? To begin answering these questions, we turn to an illustrative study of socialization of preschoolers' emotional competence. Constructs assessed and analytical methodology follow directly from these questions.

## Method

**Participants and Procedures.** We worked with 80 preschoolers and their parents (48 boys; 53 followed from age 3 through kindergarten, mostly upper-middle class Caucasians). Children were between 3 and 4 years old when their families were visited. During the home visit, we studied self-reports and observations of all three aspects of socialization of emotions already outlined here: parental expressiveness, reactions to children's emotions, and teaching about emotions. Understanding and regulation of emotions were assessed when children were 3 to 4 years old and in kindergarten. Outcome and predictor measures are summarized for the reader in Table 3.1 and discussed briefly here. For all measures, psychometric properties were good to excellent.

**Table 3.1. Summary of Predictor and Outcome Measures**

<i>Predictors and outcomes</i>	<i>Method/operationalization</i>
Parent Measures—Predictors	
Observed expressive balance	Observation of emotional expressions: Prevalence of happiness minus prevalence of sadness, anger, and fear
Self-reported expressive balance	Self-Expressiveness Within The Family Questionnaire: Positive minus negative expressiveness scores
Observed parental reactions to emotions balance	Observation of reactions to children's emotional expressions: Standard scores for positive matching, positive reinforcing, and prosocial reactions minus standard scores for rates of antisocial and passive reactions were subtracted.
Self-reported parental reactions to emotions balance	Coping with Children's Negative Emotions Scale: Coaching totals (emotion- or problem-focused coping, and encouraging emotions) minus dismissing totals (punitive, minimizing, and distress reactions)
Observed parental teaching about emotions	Conversations about emotional events: Sum of parents' positive and negative emotion terms
Self-reported parental teaching about emotions	Emotion-Related Beliefs Scale: Summed items as an index of parents' valuing teaching their children about emotions Parent-rated parent inductive discipline: Average induction score, summing the continuum level of each response, and dividing by the number of responses given
Child Measures—Outcomes	
Emotion Knowledge Aggregate, Ages three to four	Sum of standard scores for receptive and expressive identification, and two emotion situation tasks
Display rule knowledge, kindergarten	Total score for understanding display rules (hiding + showing)
Constructive, venting, and avoidant coping	Sum of parent-report items

### **Measures of Socialization of Emotion: Parental Expressiveness**

*Observation of Emotional Expressions.* Parents' emotions and reactions to the child's emotions were observed for a total of ninety minutes during home visits. Parents' observed expressive balance score was created by subtracting the percentage of angry, sad, and fearful displays from the percentage of happy displays.

*Self-Expressiveness Within the Family Questionnaire.* On an adaptation of the Family Expressiveness Questionnaire (SEFQ; Halberstadt et al.,

1995), parents reported their frequency of emotional displays within their family. For each parent, a self-reported expressive balance score equaled the difference between positive and negative expressiveness scores.

### **Measures of Socialization of Emotion: Reactions to Children's Emotions**

*Observed Reactions to Children's Emotions.* Reactions to emotions were observed during the home visit. For the observed reactions to emotions balance score, standard scores for rates of antisocial and passive reactions were subtracted from the sum of standard scores for rates of positive matching, positive reinforcing, and prosocial reactions.

*Coping with Children's Negative Emotions Scale.* In the Coping with Children's Negative Emotion Scale (CCNES; Fabes, Poulin, Eisenberg, & Madden-Derdich, 2002), parents rated how likely they are to choose reactions to specific scenarios involving children's negative emotions. Balance scores for self-reported reactions to emotions equaled the difference between coaching totals (emotion- or problem-focused coping, and encouraging emotions responses) and dismissing totals (punitive, minimizing, and distress reaction responses).

### **Measures of Socialization of Emotion: Coaching About Emotions**

*Conversations About Emotional Events.* Each parent-child dyad performed a semi-structured naturalistic task to assess emotion language; they reminisced about times when each of them had shown happy, sad, angry, and afraid emotions in the other's presence. The audiotaped, transcribed conversations were coded using the Parent-Child Affect Communication Task (PACT) System (Denham et al., 1994). For this study, parents' positive and negative emotion terms, as well as total references to self, target, and others, were summed.

*Emotion-Related Beliefs Scale.* Hyson and Lee's (1996) Teacher Emotion-Related Beliefs (ERB) measure was adapted for parents. Sample items include "I spend a lot of time talking to my children about why they feel the way they do." Items were summed to create an index of parents' valuing teaching their children about emotions.

### **Measures of Children's Emotional Competence**

*Children's Coping with Negative Emotion.* Eisenberg and colleagues' (Eisenberg et al., 1993) Children's Coping with Negative Emotion Questionnaire, was used to measure children's emotion regulation. Mothers (when children were 3 to 4 years old) and kindergarten teachers rated the likelihood that the child would engage in constructive, emotional venting, and avoidant coping emotion regulatory responses (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1994).

*Emotion Knowledge (3- to 4-Year-Old Assessment): Affect Knowledge Test (AKT).* Because these measures have been described in detail elsewhere (Denham and Couchoud, 1990a, 1990b), they are summarized as follows: Children receptively and expressively identified happy, sad,



angry, and afraid facial expressions drawn on flannel faces. For emotionally unequivocal and equivocal situation identification tasks, a puppeteer made standard facial and vocal expressions of emotions while enacting an emotion-laden story. The child was asked to place, on the puppet, the flannel face depicting the puppet's feeling in the situation. Standard scores for each item of these tasks were summed for the emotion knowledge aggregate.

*Kindergarten Assessment Test: Knowledge of Emotion Display Rules* (Gross and Harris, 1988). In each of six stories, a feeling needed to be hidden or shown (in a "hiding" story, protagonists need to hide sadness to avoid big brother's teasing; in a "showing" story, sadness needed to be shown when lost in a store and needing help). We used a total score for understanding display rules.

## Results and Discussion

**Socialization of Emotion: Mother/Father Differences, Child Gender Differences, and Interactions Between Parenting and Child Gender.** How do we understand the impact of gender on the emotional lives of families? How can we describe the experience of little girls and boys, fathers and mothers? We first asked whether mothers and fathers differed in their observed and self-reported expressiveness balance, whether there were overall child gender differences in how parents socialized emotional competence, and, finally, whether parent effects were moderated by child gender. Results are shown in Table 3.2.

Many interpretable differences in socialization of emotion were found based on parent gender. Fathers' observed expressive balance was greater than mothers'. In contrast, mothers self-reported expressive balance score was greater than fathers'. This dichotomy at first seemed puzzling, but then we realized that fathers, as playmates, may indeed show more happiness than mothers (the only positive emotion we observed); in contrast, mothers were able to report on a range of positive and negative emotions on the SEFQ; this self-report also fits with Brody and Hall's (1993) review of female expressiveness.

Regarding differences in mothers' and fathers' reactions to children's emotions, mothers reported significantly more positive reactions, relative to negative ones, than fathers. There were no significant effects for observed reactions to emotions (see also Cassano, Perry-Parrish, & Zeman, 2007). Moreover, for both expressiveness and reactions to emotions, there were no significant main effects or interactions involving child gender. Regarding the seeming inconsistency between observational and self-report methodologies, parents may be able to envision a wider variety of child emotions to react to than we were able to observe during the home visits.

For observed conversations about emotions, fathers talked more about emotions to daughters than to sons. These findings with fathers

**Table 3.2. Socialization of Emotion Differences: Parent, Child Gender, and Parent × Child Gender Effects**

	<i>F</i> Parent	<i>F</i> Child gender	<i>F</i> Parent × child gender	<i>Other</i>
Observed expressive balance	4.69*	—	—	
Self-reported expressive balance	7.46**	—	—	
Observed parental reactions to emotions balance	—	—	—	
Self-reported parental reactions balance	89.1***	2.67+	—	
Observed parental teaching about emotions	—	Mothers more positive to boys	4.68* Fathers talk more to girls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Parent × Valence × Child Gender <math>F = 4.66^*</math></li> <li>○ Mothers talk more than fathers, to sons, about negative emotions</li> <li>○ Parent × Valence × Referent = 13.01***</li> <li>○ Mothers talk more about self-emotions than fathers</li> </ul>
Self-reported parental teaching about emotions	20.93***	—	—	
	Mothers higher on PDS			
	61.73***			
	Mothers higher on ERB			

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

ERB = Emotion-Related Beliefs Scale, PDS = Parent Disciplinary

echo those that Adams and colleagues (1995; see also Kuebli & Fivush, 1992) found for both parents. In our study, however, in contrast to Fivush and colleagues (2003; see also Fivush, 1991), mothers talked about emotions equivalently to boys as to girls, but talked far more to sons about negative emotions than did fathers. Moreover, mothers talked more about their own negative emotions than did fathers, with fathers talking more about the child's and other persons' emotions. Finally, mothers reported valuing teaching about emotions, more than fathers. Many of these differences would be predicted by gender theory; we see the difference in mothers' talk about their own emotions as parallel their greater focus on the interpersonal in discussions of emotion with their young children (Chance & Fiese, 1999; Fivush et al., 2000).

Thus, our findings tell us that mothers and fathers do socialize preschoolers' emotional competence differently. However, parents' emotion socialization of boys and girls generally did not differ (see also Klimes-Dougan et al., 2007, for similar findings). Further, Parent  $\times$  Child Gender interactions only appeared for conversations about emotion. Thus, we see a nuanced picture of mothers' and fathers' affective environment provided to preschoolers, in which mothers appeared to bear the responsibility for the emotional function of the family. At the same time, though, fathers' roles as enthusiastic, emotionally positive playmates and their discussions of emotions with daughters came to light.

**Predicting Emotional Competence.** Next, we asked how maternal and paternal aspects of socialization of emotions uniquely predicted aspects of preschoolers' emotional competences, and whether such prediction varied for boys and girls. We accomplished this goal via a series of multiple regression equations. Criterion variables were preschool and kindergarten aspects of emotional competence. In the first step of separate equations, we entered mothers' and fathers' observed and self-reported indices for each socialization factor and child's gender. The results of the first step of regressions are summarized in Table 3.3 (for simplicity, only beta weights for borderline or significant predictors are shown).

Next, because one of our foci was on child gender's effects on the relation between parental socialization of emotion and child outcome, we created interaction terms between child's gender and each socialization factor, and entered these in a second step. We interpret only those where post hoc probing (Holmbeck, 2002) indicated significant betas for boys or girls; Figures 3.1 through 3.7 show the results of these post hoc probings.

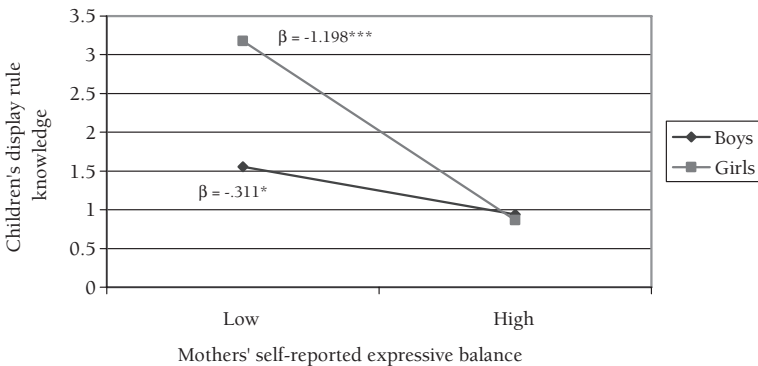
**Children's Emotion Knowledge.** Mother's observed expressive balance *negatively* and fathers' observed expressive balance and self-reported expressive balance *positively* predicted preschool emotion knowledge. Maternal self-reported expressive balance *negatively* predicted kindergarten's later display rule knowledge, especially girls' (see Figure 3.1), whereas paternal self-reported expressive balance *positively* predicted

**Table 3.3. Socialization of Emotion’s Contribution to Preschoolers’ Emotion Knowledge and Emotion Regulation at Ages 3 to 4 and in Kindergarten**

<i>Child outcomes</i>	<i>Observed parental</i>	<i>Self-reported parental</i>
<b>Parental expressive balance</b>		
Emotion knowledge aggregate, ages 3 to 4	$\beta_{\text{Mother}} = -.312^*$ $\beta_{\text{Father}} = .368^{**}$	$\beta_{\text{Father}} = .204^+$
Display rule knowledge, kindergarten	—	$\beta_{\text{Mother}} = -.460^{**}$ $\beta_{\text{Father}} = .319^{**}$
Avoidant coping, ages 3 to 4	$\beta_{\text{Mother}} = -.262^+$	—
Avoidant coping, kindergarten	$\beta_{\text{Mother}} = .306^+$	$\beta_{\text{Father}} = .293^+$
<b>Parental reactions to emotions balance</b>		
Constructive coping, ages 3 to 4	—	$\beta_{\text{Mother}} = .298^*$
Avoidant coping, ages 3 to 4	$\beta_{\text{Mother}} = -.224^+$	$\beta_{\text{Mother}} = .201^+$
Constructive coping, kindergarten	$\beta_{\text{Father}} = .234^+$	—
Venting coping, kindergarten	$\beta_{\text{Mother}} = -.358^+$ $\beta_{\text{Father}} = .317^*$	—
<b>Parental teaching</b>		
Display rule knowledge, kindergarten	$\beta_{\text{Mother Positive}} = -.343^+$ $\beta_{\text{Mother Negative}} = .402^*$	—

Note. <sup>+</sup>  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ .

**Figure 3.1. Mothers’ Self-Reported Expressive Balance Predicting Display Rule Knowledge for Kindergarten Boys and Girls**



the same index, again especially for girls (see Figure 3.2). Thus, parental patterns of expressiveness also worked together in interesting ways. Perhaps viewing this mixed emotionality gives children a window into the complexity of the full range of emotions, especially the need for display rules (McElwain, Halberstadt, & Volling, 2007). Further, it may be that fathers’ showing and/or reporting more positive emotions allowed for

children's secure emotional foundation, and the mildly negative emotions reported by or seen in mothers afforded children the exposure necessary to acquire rich emotion knowledge.

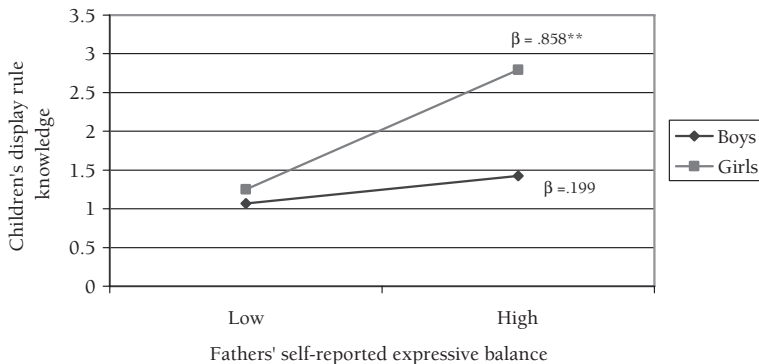
Finally, maternal usage of positive emotion terms *negatively*, and maternal usage of negative emotion terms *positively* predicted, kindergartners' later display rule knowledge. Perhaps knowing more about negative emotions is more germane to learning which emotions should be expressed and which hidden. In sum, mothers' fuller, gender-expected, display of and teaching about negative emotions, and their contribution to children's emotion knowledge, may be part of their emotional gatekeeper role in the family.

Another theme in our findings is that of "missing socialization factors"—for example, parental reactions to children's emotions did not predict emotion knowledge, in contrast with earlier research, such as both Denham and others (1994) and Fabes and others (2002). It may be that methodological and analytical decisions in this study rendered any possible contributions of parental reactions to emotions to emotion knowledge harder to discern.

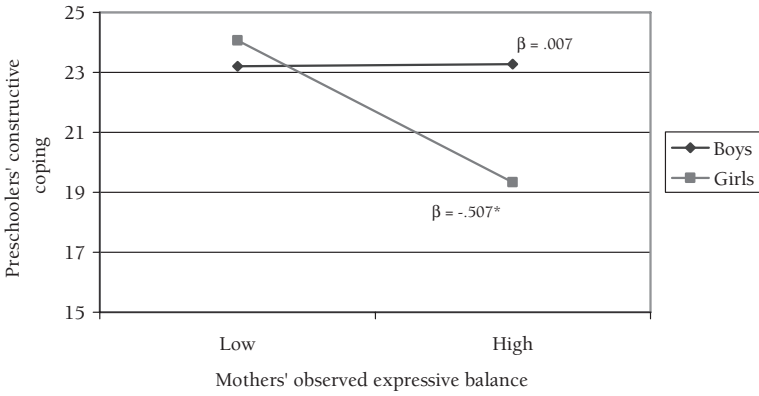
*Emotion Regulation.* Differences between what parents say and what observers see, which may be more content than methodology, constitute another theme in our regression findings. For example, where mothers were observed to show more negative emotions, but reported a positive emotional substrate in the family, preschool-aged daughters evidenced more constructive emotion regulatory strategies (see Figures 3.3 and 3.4). As with display rule knowledge, perhaps this mixture of emotional events gives children, particularly daughters, fodder to construct workable emotion regulatory coping strategies

At the same time, maternal observed expressive balance negatively predicted preschoolers' avoidant emotion regulation strategies; in

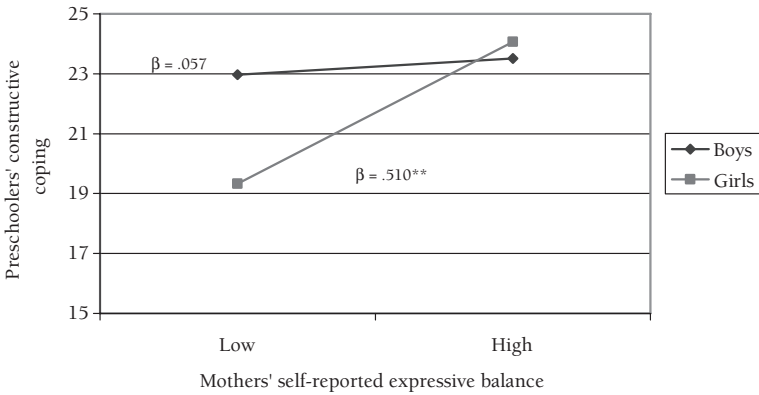
**Figure 3.2. Fathers' Self-Reported Expressive Balance Predicting Display Rule Knowledge for Kindergarten Boys and Girls**



**Figure 3.3. Mothers' Observed Expressive Balance Predicting Constructive Coping for Preschool Boys and Girls**



**Figure 3.4. Mothers' Self-Reported Expressive Balance Predicting Constructive Coping for Preschool Boys and Girls**



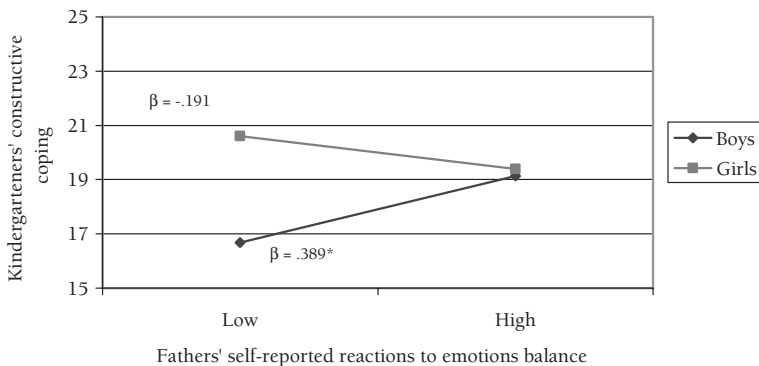
contrast, it positively predicted kindergartners' use of avoidant emotion regulation strategies, as did fathers' self-reported expressive balance. These findings are difficult to reconcile, but perhaps the profile of more avoidant emotion regulatory strategies (for example, distraction, leaving, ignoring the situation) changes across the two-year-period of study. For 3-year-olds, maternal negativity may promote children's use of leaving when faced with emotionally difficult situations—that is, the children want to escape mothers' and their own negative feelings. In contrast, by the time children are mature kindergartners, their parents' positive emotional styles may have formed a foundation for the use of distraction to maintain an even keel.

For parents' reactions to children's emotions, preschoolers' constructive emotion regulation strategies were predicted at a borderline level of significance by mothers' self-reported reactions to emotions balance. Kindergartners', especially boys' (see Figure 3.5), constructive emotion regulation strategies were predicted by fathers' observed reaction balance two years earlier. Thus, mothers' and fathers' optimal reaction patterns are useful at different time periods and, at least for fathers, more so for same-sex pairings. These patterns of prediction need replication and their theoretical underpinnings need further consideration. It seems logical, however, that parents' more supportive reactions to children's emotions could serve as models of constructive emotion regulation, as well as allowing for more "teachable moments" about emotions.

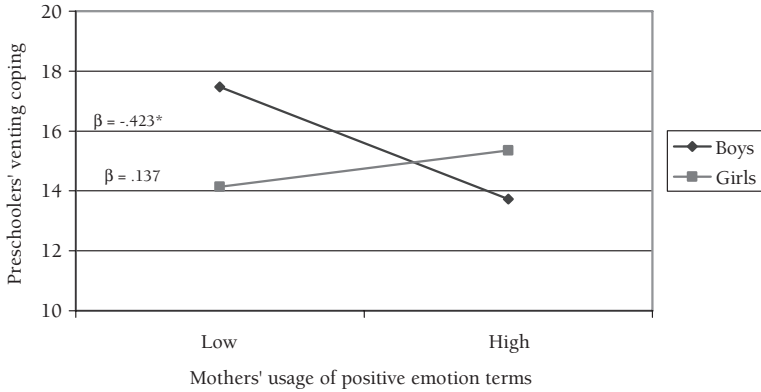
Preschoolers' avoidant emotion regulation strategies were negatively predicted at a borderline level of significance by mothers' observed reaction balance, but *positively* predicted by mothers' self-reported reactions to emotions balance score. Venting emotion regulation strategies in kindergarten were *negatively* predicted by mothers' observed reaction balance, but *positively* by fathers' observed reaction balance. Here we again see both themes of differential prediction by mothers and fathers and from differing methodologies.

Regarding parental teaching about emotions, where mothers talked more about positive emotion, their preschool-aged sons less frequently used venting emotion regulation strategies, and their daughters less frequently used avoidant emotion regulation strategies (see Figures 3.6 and 3.7). The greater salience of the family context for girls' behavior here and in earlier findings is worthy of note (see also Denham et al., 1997). Both aspects of girls' emotional competence, during at least one age period, were particularly susceptible to parental socialization of emotion and its distinctions.

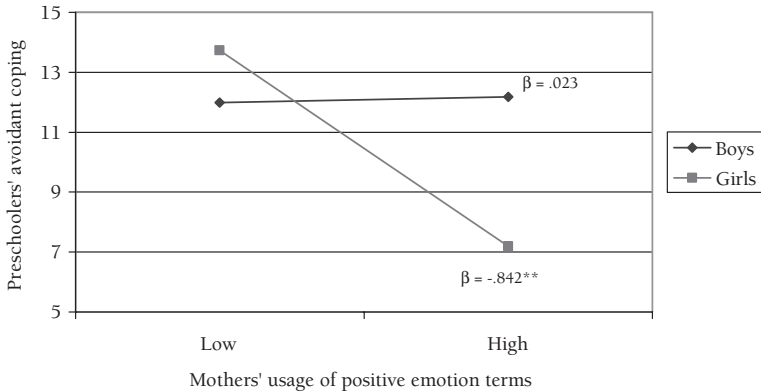
**Figure 3.5. Fathers' Self-Reported Reactions to Emotions Balance Predicting Kindergartners' Constructive Coping for Boys and Girls**



**Figure 3.6. Mothers' Usage of Positive Emotion Terms Predicting Venting Coping for Preschool Boys and Girls**



**Figure 3.7. Mothers' Self-Reported Expressive Balance Predicting Display Rule Knowledge for Kindergarten Boys and Girls**



Daughters seem to be quintessential observers of parents' emotions and listeners to parents' teaching about emotions.

However, returning to the notion of "missing socialization factors," there were few contributions of parental teaching to children's emotion regulation strategies. As noted earlier, this theoretically appealing notion has not been tested. It may be that children's regulatory strategies are still intimately tied to their more biologically based temperamental reactivity at this point (Rothbart, Posner, & Kieras, 2006), and as yet less amenable to parental teaching. In any case, little regulation-related emotion language from either parent was seen in these data. Less-reactive youngsters



may be more easily socialized at this age (Mirabile, Scaramella, Sohr-Preston, & Robison, 2009); in future studies such moderation should be more extensively studied.

Finally, it is clear that inclusion of paternal report and observations of fathers were important in fleshing out the entire picture of socialization of emotion during the preschool years. Fathers' socialization figured in emotion knowledge, as well as all three emotion regulatory strategies. Studying only maternal socialization of emotion would, then, leave us with incomplete understanding of the socialization of young children's emotional competence.

## Conclusion

In sum, we found that parents of preschoolers do differ in their socialization of emotion, but that mothers' and fathers' styles do not usually differ for sons and daughters (except where conversing about emotions). We also found several themes in the prediction of preschoolers' emotion knowledge and regulation. Mothers' and fathers' socialization of emotion styles are different in predictable ways—with mothers as emotional gatekeeper and fathers as loving playmate. As well, their techniques differentially predict young children's emotional competence, and sometimes mother–father differences in emotional style actually seem to promote such competence. Girls seem particularly susceptible to parental socialization of emotion. Finally, sometimes differences between what parents said and what observers saw seemed interpretable, rather than mere methodological error, and some socialization factors did not predict either emotion knowledge or emotion regulation.

Where do we (and others) go from here? How do these results challenge our thinking or point to a new direction in this field? First, several of the themes require more attention—for example, those about differences in parental predictors and methodologies could be profitably explored further. The issue of children making use of emotional divergences in their parents is an intriguing one brought up by McElwain et al. (2007), and it seems ready for deeper investigation. Second, our findings about girls should be integrated into the larger literature on development of girls' social-emotional competence and psychopathology (Zahn-Waxler, Shirtcliff, & Marceau, 2008). Third, our findings on mothers as bearing the family's emotional function (with fathers as support figures) during the preschool period fit well with other literature in the area, and point to a new direction: It would be useful to move away from our focus on the preschool period, to examine these specific aspects of parental socialization of emotion and emotional competence sequelae through adolescence. For example, it could be conjectured that parents' socialization of emotion might become more restrictive as children age, and that certain differences between parents and in ways of treating boys and girls might diminish or

intensify (just how is an empirical question, and ripe for more pinpointed theorizing).

Finally, future work needs to be done with samples composed of other cultural or socioeconomic groups, for whom socialization of emotion and its relation to gender may have different meanings. Other clinical subsamples, such as families where there is interparental conflict, even violence, or maternal depression, should be studied in this regard, as well.

In short, our findings confirm the importance of the inclusion of data from both parents, considering the function of emotions within the family, and taking into account parent and child gender when fleshing out the entire picture of socialization of emotional competence during the preschool years. It is hoped that these results and accompanying thinking will spur the field to greater study and understanding of these issues.

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