
**LISTENING TO PARENTS:
CULTURAL VARIATIONS IN THE MEANING OF
EMOTIONS AND EMOTION SOCIALIZATION**

*Susanne DENHAM¹, Selma CAAL¹, Hideko Hamada BASSETT¹
Oana BENGĂ², Elena GEANGU²*

¹George Mason University, USA

²Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania

ABSTRACT

Emotional competence is vital to children's social and academic success, as well as their short- and long-term well-being and mental health; parents are active in socializing such emotional competence. In a series of focus groups, we queried parents about their emotions, to examine and understand the ways that they conceive of emotion and its place in their own and their young children's lives. Our goal was to examine differences and commonalities that parents within and across American, Hispanic-born, Japanese-born, and Romanian cultures, regarding the emotions they experience and express, their children's reactions, and what they wish their children to learn from the parent's emotions. Narrative data were analyzed via qualitative coding. Differences and similarities within and across cultures are noted and their implications are discussed.

KEY-WORDS: *emotion, socialization, culture, qualitative method, children*

In this study we sought to examine and understand the various ways that parents of young children conceive of emotion and its place in their own and their children's lives. More specifically, our goal was to examine differences and commonalities that parents within and across different cultures express regarding the emotions they experience and express, their children's reactions, and what they wish their children to learn from the parent's emotions.

An issue in much emotions research is the tension between the interpretation of emotions as universal versus culture-specific (Izard, 1994; Russell, 1995). Although this particular argument focuses on specific facial expressions and language used to describe emotions, we prefer to take a more functionalist approach to emotions – what do they *do for* the people experiencing

Corresponding author:

Susanne A. Denham, Ph.D., Dept. of Psychology, George Mason University, MS 3F5, 4400
University Drive, Fairfax, Virginia 22030-4444
E-mail: sdenham@gmu.edu

We also have new evidence (Denham & Kochanoff, 2002) that emotionally negative preschoolers who engage with equally negative playmates, both in terms of emotional expressiveness and reactions to others' emotions, show lessened social competence across time.

Second, when the young child begins to regulate his or her own emotions, s/he gets along more successfully with peers and adults alike. For example, Eisenberg and colleagues (Eisenberg et al., 1993; Eisenberg et al., 1997; Eisenberg et al., 2001; Eisenberg et al., 2003) have found that preschoolers' and primary school children's regulation styles are related to socially appropriate behavior. Maternal and teacher reports of constructive modes of emotion regulatory coping also are associated with success with peers (Eisenberg et al., 1994).

Emotional knowledge also predicts social competence. For example, accurate interpretation of others' emotions provides important information about social situations, and may activate sympathy that motivates the child to react in positive, prosocial ways (Eisenberg, 1986). Preschoolers' understanding of emotions relates to their positive peer status, teacher ratings of social competence, and prosocial reactions to emotions (Denham, 1986, 1997; Denham et al., 1990; Denham et al., 1997; Dixon, Denham, & Blair, 1998).

Furthermore, although these emotional competence tasks are not easy ones for children just entering the peer arena, children become increasingly emotionally competent over time. Growing evidence suggests not only that such emotional competence contributes to children's social competence and well-being during the preschool years, but that it also predicts later outcomes, such as school readiness and mental health (Denham, 1998; Saarni, 1999). Thus, successful interaction with age-mates, supported by emotional competence, is a crucial predictor of later mental health and well-being, even school adjustment, learning and academic success – beginning during preschool, and continuing thereafter (Birch, Ladd, & Blecher-Sass, 1997; Denham & Holt, 1993; Ladd, Birch, & Buhs, 1999; Ladd, Kochenderfer, & Coleman, 1996; Robins & Rutter, 1990; Smith, 2001). In particular, when developmental milestones are not negotiated successfully, preschoolers are at risk for psychopathology, both at the time and later in life (Cytryn et al., 1986; Denham et al., 1991; Kohlberg, LaCrosse, & Ricks, 1972; Roff, 1990).

If emotional competence is intimately related with social competence and mental health, the question of its cultivation, the origins of individual differences in emotional competence, must be answered. We assert that interpersonal factors – specifically the manner in which parents socialize emotions – are either foundations of or roadblocks to such emotional competence.

Socialization of emotions is ubiquitous in children's everyday contact with other people. All the people with whom children interact exhibit a variety of emotions, which the children observe. Further, children's emotions often require some kind of reaction from their social partners, and intentionally teaching about the world of emotions is considered by some adults to be an important area of socialization (Dix, 1991; Eisenberg & Fabes, 1994; Eisenberg, Fabes, & Murphy,

1996; Eisenberg et al., 1994; Eisenberg et al., 1999; Gottman, Katz, & Hooven, 1997). These three mechanisms describe socialization of emotion: modeling emotional expressiveness, reactions to children's emotions, and teaching about emotion (Denham, 1998; Denham, Grant, & Hamada, 2002; Eisenberg, Cumberland, & Spinrad, 1998; Halberstadt, 1991; Tomkins, 1991). Eisenberg, Cumberland and Spinrad (1998) cited evidence for all three mechanisms, with regard to parents. Their conclusions suggest that each of these mechanisms influence children's emotional expression, regulation, and understanding, as well as social functioning. In particular, being brought up in an environment which is rich in emotion, but relatively more positive than negative, where parents are relatively accepting of young children's emotions, but also help them regulate emotions, and participating in conversations about emotions, all seem generally predictive of young children's emotional competence (Denham, 1998; Eisenberg et al., 1998).

Hence, we have some empirically-based notion of the emotional competencies that support positive development, and the socialization techniques that foster them. However, important gaps exist in the state of our knowledge. We know much more about middle class American parents', especially mothers, emotional socialization, and about their children's emotional competence, than we do about any other cultural or subcultural group. This state of knowledge is unfortunate, and must be rectified. Our ability to predict positive outcomes for children, and to promote emotion socialization practices that support them, depends on an intimate and correct knowledge of the emotion-related cultural beliefs and practices, and emotion rules, of the cultural group in which they live.

Two brief examples serve to highlight the importance of this principle that cultural and even subcultural differences must be taken into account when conclusions are made about emotional and social competence, and their socialization. First, in Western exemplifications of developmental psychology, much is made of findings that young children who are behaviorally inhibited tend to exhibit difficulties in social interaction (Rubin, Burgess, & Hastings, 2002). However, in some Asian cultures, shy children fare well, ostensibly because of their match with collectivist, societal expectations and valuing of restraint (Chen, 2000).

Second, the relations of harsh, authoritarian parenting with children's social-emotional outcomes have often been assumed to be negative (Baumrind, 1971). As compared with the Euro-American parents, however, African-American parents have been noted to enforce rules more regularly, afford their children fewer decision making opportunities, endorse more controlling attitudes, and use more consistent discipline practices – but also have more positive relationships with their children and engage in more proactive behavior promotion and prevention (Early, 1995; Kilgore, Snyder, & Lentz, 2000). Moreover, more recent investigations have uncovered a possible sub-cultural or ethnic difference in children's psychosocial outcomes arising from European American and African American parents' use of more power assertive childrearing practices – that in African American samples,

authoritarian approaches to parenting, and in some samples even physical punishment, are not associated with conduct problems (McCoy, 2002). Thus, it seems clear that different ecological niches may affect the manner in which parents use physical discipline, the meaning that children attach to the experience of physical discipline, and its effects on the adjustment of children and adolescents (Lansford et al., 2004).

More generally, there are aspects of parenting that may enhance child adjustment across cultural groups, but there also are those whose effects are dependent on the cultural context in which they take place (McCoy, 2002). Thus, it is clear that even if we expect some universality in parents' emotions and their socialization of emotion for their children, we need to also look for differences between and within cultures. For example, a given behavior, such as an angry verbal outburst, can have very different meanings in different cultures; at the same time, the range of behaviors, attitudes, or values that are relevant to a particular emotion-related construct may vary across different cultures (Hughes, Seidman, & Williams, 1993). Hughes and colleagues (1993) point out that, given these important lines of reasoning, qualitative methods may be very useful, because they allow the meaning of behaviors and the relevant categories for understanding to emerge through inductive analysis.

The Current Study

Given these points, we asked parents in this study, mostly mothers, about their experience and expression of emotions. Given a functionalist "base" regarding experience and expression of emotions, we started with the following broad questions to ask of them:

- What emotions do parents show?
- What causes them?
- How often and intensely do they display them?
- How do parents express these emotions and cope with them? How do they evaluate their incidents of emotion, as hurtful or helpful?
- What are their children's reactions to these displays?

Methods

Procedure and Participants

Information from American-born mothers was collected via diary and interview before publication in 1992 (Denham & Grout, 1992). Some of this information will be included here for comparison purposes, but the main data for this investigation emanated from focus groups with Japanese- and Hispanic-born mothers and fathers ($n = 3$ and 4 , respectively, in the U.S.) and 7 Romanian mothers (in Romania). Although the focus of the current study is on parents' discussions of happiness, sadness, and anger, for each cultural group, the focus groups occurred over several meetings and included other emotions (e.g., excitement, pride, tension/fear) as well.

Krueger's (1998a; 1998b) and Morgan's (1998a; 1998b) work guided the focus group methodology used in the study. The groups were conducted using a flexible list of open-ended questions (see Appendix). These questions, developed with care to avoid assumptions of cross-cultural equivalence, and piloted by the research team, were based originally on the interview and diary questions from Denham and Grout (1992). The questions in their final, piloted form were used as an interview guide to stimulate discussion.

It is also important to note the advantages and disadvantages of using focus groups. Advantages include the convenience of having all participants gather in one place, and, more importantly, the synergistic effects of interaction in enhancing discussion of the topic. One disadvantage of which facilitators had to be aware is that some individuals are slow to participate readily in a group setting and are more likely to be forthcoming in individual interviews. Prior to the focus groups, such aspects of the methodology were discussed.

One of the authors facilitated each focus group discussion. Each focus group began with the facilitators providing an overview of the process. This included reminders that there were no right or wrong answers, all comments and opinions were welcomed, group confidentiality about identities and experiences would be maintained, and participants were free to leave the group at any time. A cofacilitator took notes, dealt with refreshments, if any, and managed the recording equipment for each session. Each session lasted approximately two hours and was held in a comfortable, private area in the schools involved. Focus group discussions, including questions and each participant's answering narratives, were tape-recorded and transcribed.

Interviews and focus groups were conducted in the native language of the participants, translated into English, and back-translated into the native language of the participants. Informal respondent validation was employed during the focus groups, to maximize the adequacy and plausibility of the data. Throughout the focus groups, each facilitator asked participants if she was understanding what they were saying, thus providing respondents with the opportunity to correct any misunderstandings that may have arisen, and adding additional data to the project that was used to enrich the analyses and increase the credibility of the findings.

Ethical committee approval was obtained locally in each study site, and passive, informed consent was obtained from all focus group participants in the focus groups (active informed consent having been obtained for interviews with American mothers).

Results

Data Coding

The inductive generation of coding categories is called open coding. In this methodology, investigators break down, conceptualize, and categorize the data (in this case all the statements made by focus group participants). Codes are created when investigators place a label on happenings, events, or other instances or

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phenomena. In this project, all transcripts were perused on a line-by-line basis and codes were developed to label key themes in the data.

We used the transcripts to perform computer-assisted qualitative analysis with the assistance of Ethnograph 5.07™ (Seidel, Kjolseth, & Seymour, 1988), a software program for computer-based text search and retrieval. Specifically, all transcriptions of focus group verbalizations were entered into Ethnograph, and the file for each emotion was reviewed, for each cultural group. We began with codes that corresponded broadly to the coding categories that were used in quantitative analyses of the Denham and Grout (Denham & Grout, 1992) interviews and diaries, but allowed the actual words of the parents to suggest modifications and additions to these original coding categories. Each file was coded using the final set of categories, and the program was then used to print all the data corresponding to each individual coding category.

Two investigators coded each of the transcripts independently, applying as many codes as needed for each data segment. A third investigator, trained in qualitative methods, reviewed the coded material to ensure inter-rater reliability. Ambiguities or disagreements in coding were resolved by discussion between the two coding investigators and the reviewing investigator.

In general, we found many similarities, but also many differences, within and between cultures for each of the coding categories. We will review these similarities and differences here, by coding category within emotion.

Emotion One: Happiness

Causes of happiness. American mothers discussed happy events in their lives as being caused by sharing time or playing with their children, seeing their children happy, obtaining their children's help. There were some similarities across focus groups – Hispanic-born mothers (and one father) also mentioned children causing their happiness three times, such as:

“Yes, when they are fine, I feel that everything around me is fine.”

“I like it and I feel happy when they are healthy and they go to school.”

These parents, along with the Romanian mothers, seemed to emphasize children's health more than the American or Japanese parents. They also discussed happiness “...reaching a new goal...” (three references). These parents also discussed several other reasons to be happy:

“Since I have come here...I do not leave spaces to think about negative things”

“We have to try to be fine and show happiness, for them [the children]”

“Give yourself completely ... like planting a seed”

The Japanese parents mentioned happiness caused by their children five times, such as:

“When my child said something sweet.”

“And when my child did something cute.”

In their case, endearing things done or said by their children seemed to bring happiness. They also mentioned attaining goals, such as:

“After I clean the house, I drink tea. In the clean house, I only smell bleach. At that moment, I feel happy.”

One Japanese parent discussed eating favorite foods and the Japanese father mentioned seeing a beautiful sunset.

Finally, Romanian mothers discussed happiness caused by their children 12 times, such as:

"I am also happy in the presence of my child all the time."

"I enjoy everything related to my children."

"When she is present I feel a tremendous joy....since she came on this world I feel complete."

"The girls keep picking me flowers, which makes me very happy inside, even if I don't show them too much of it."

The Romanian mothers also mentioned happiness from attaining a goal, "when you succeed in doing something" like finishing making a suit for one's son's festival. In addition, Romanian mothers suggested that events made them happy five times, citing the healing powers of nature ("I feel like laughing, like something explodes within me"), living in peace, a sunny day, or making a good deed. These women also mentioned their families overall, and their spouses in particular, six and four times, respectively. These points of view were not mentioned by the other parents, perhaps because, for Romanian culture, having a happy and healthy family is still a major goal to be met.

Frequency and intensity of happiness.

In their interviews and diaries, American mothers mentioned happiness as very frequent and very intense. Hispanic parents offered three comments on the length and intensity of happiness. They suggested that these parameters depend on the situation:

"Sometimes it lasts for a long time and sometimes it goes away fast. It depends on why you are happy."

Japanese parents made 17 comments about the length and intensity of happiness. Some considered that happiness lasts a long time, while others considered it short; more so, they emphasized its dependence on random factors and its waning.

"I think happiness coming from feeling of accomplishment may last long."

"Even if something happens and I feel happy, I may not feel same way next time the same thing happens."

"The feeling may become less and less with time if I think about it too often."

Romanian mothers also discussed these intensive and temporal parameters 17 times. Mostly, they discussed feeling always happy "if you have no problem":

"But I have to say I have a continuous feeling of contentment, not jumping of joy, but contentment and fulfillment"

"Very often, that's for sure"

"...a small thing can bring me enough happiness for the entire day"

"It [whether happiness lasts] depends on the people around me and on the problems that might appear."

"Ok, I can get very easily happy, depending on my mood. That is because the same things which bring me joy at one particular moment, don't mean that much in another, so it really depends on my mood."

One Romanian mother, discussing how her happiness was not as intense as another's, said, "I simply don't have a vocation for it." It should be noted anecdotally, as well, that the Romanian mothers had difficulties in exploring their emotional states, so that their identification of frequency and intensity of happiness might be biased.

Means of Expression.

American mothers, in their interviews and diaries, spoke of expressing happiness very openly, especially by hugging and smiling. They considered the overall experience and expression of happiness to be a positive experience that reassures and rewards both them and their children. Hispanic parents concurred that one showed happiness very directly with children, but perhaps somewhat differently with adults:

"When I am very happy I hug them...Talking to them, telling them and showing them you express it more intensely to children than to adults."

"...sharing and serving them something they like...doing the things that they like...I am ready to do what they want"

"To adults, I think that they see my tranquility."

Japanese parents also mentioned differentiating expression of happiness with adults versus children (e.g., "You can't tickle adults."):

"I may not share the feeling with other people."

"There is no point telling how happy I am to someone I don't know"

"To children, I would give them kisses and hugs, and tickle them to let them know how happy I am. I would express my happiness using whole body."

Romanian mothers also discussed physical means of showing happiness ("I jump, I hug and kiss"), and that they were more overt with children than with adults ("I probably smile more; I behave differently"; "to an adult...I tell you frankly I don't smile"):

"I am kind with everyone, I make compliments to everybody, and I'm just being nice."

"But I don't see any harm in expressing happiness in whatever way you can."

"It [how happiness is expressed] depends on everyone's personality."

Happiness was seen as helpful by Romanians nine times; "it keeps your spirit high and helps you work more easily"; "when I am happy, my husband is also"; "I didn't see the reason to temperate a feeling that makes you feel good". On the other hand, several comments were made showing that there could indeed be times to regulate happiness ("it depends on how you show it"). Hispanic-born mothers mentioned only once, that happiness does not need regulation; "there is not an inappropriate way [to show happiness]".

In contrast, Japanese parents mentioned regulation of happiness nine times, more often than not suggesting this emotion might need to be controlled:

"I think my judgment becomes dull when I am happy."

"It would be inappropriate to show happiness at a funeral."

One mother noted that when she obtained an excellent test score, she shouldn't act happy because it would hurt others; a Japanese father suggested that in Sumo wrestling, one should not show happiness even when winning ("Sometimes I think

it is a bad manner"). Nonetheless, Japanese parents suggested six times that happiness usually was helpful in various life situations.

Explaining happiness.

In their interviews and diaries, American mothers did not highly endorse explaining happiness. Hispanic-born parents noted four times that explanations could be useful (e.g., "Sometimes they ask and I explain."):

"Explaining is a good idea because 'something good has occurred'."

"...you are sharing your emotion and that makes you happier."

However, the Japanese-born parents did not agree as much – one parent asserted that "I want them to know how I am feeling" "It [explaining] makes them happy and later they would do the same thing again" ... but another said, "While I was explaining to my children, happiness disappeared."

Romanian mothers mentioned verbalizing or explaining happiness three times:

"I also verbalize my feelings."

"I try to tell the others how I feel."

"I give them explanations."

But Romanian mothers did not see any necessity to apologize for even very intense happiness, and neither of the other groups even mentioned it.

Children's reactions to parental happiness.

In their interviews and diaries, American mothers spoke about their child matching their happiness, sharing in it with them. Hispanic-born parents did not discuss this matter. However, Japanese parents noted some equivocal ways in which their children reacted to their displays of happiness.

"[when I am happy I become a] hug monster" and start tickling my child.

So at first he is laughing but soon he starts asking me to stop."

"When I tell my children how happy I am they often don't react as I expected."

Romanian mothers also were united in noting their children's matching response to their happiness: "He rejoices, he plays if he sees I am happy" (8 mentions).

Emotion Two: Sadness

Causes of sadness. American mothers, in their diaries and interviews, shared that various losses, daily hassles, and other nonfamily issues caused their sadness. With a different focus, Hispanic-born parents emphasized family hardship as a very potent means of causing their sadness. In addition, losses – feeling powerless in this separation from family, or due to lack of money – were spoken of very poignantly:

"It is very sad to hear bad news about the family; that is terrible."

"What saddens me the most is death."

"What I believe is very sad is when someone in the family is sick" (illness was mentioned 3 times, also in connection with being a great distance from one's family).

"Sadness also comes with loneliness... feeling lonely in a country far away from loved ones..... [there] we were all together with the purpose of having the family united."

"We don't even have someone to talk to about our matters."

"Something that can make one sad is an economic situation... When one does not have the money to resolve one's own problems or someone else's problems. One feels impotent not being able to help that loved one."

"When one is going through problems for which one cannot ask for help."

"Injustices. ... things that shouldn't happen."

In contrast, although Japanese parents did speak about specific sadness, sometimes of loneliness and potential loss (e.g., "When someone died, or got sick"; "When I feel lonely I am sad"),

"...no one to talk to because my friends were out of town [when I had a problem with my boyfriend]",

to some degree they seemed to distance themselves either in time (e.g., "I get sad about the future"; "[after the children grow up] I think my husband dies first, and then I'll be alone") or in the realism of the situation causing the sadness:

"I am very empathic so I cry when I'm reading a sad story or watching a very sad TV show."

"When it's raining, my thoughts tend to go negative."

Daily hassles did, however, also rate mention by the Japanese-born parents:

"...when they [the children] won't listen to me, and I have to repeat the same thing again and again."

"[I become] sad that I don't have a lot of money even though I work really hard."

Japanese-born parents also "denied" sadness five times, renaming what they began as a vignette about sadness as anger or anxiety. Other examples include:

"I blocked those sad memories..."

In contrast, Romanian mothers were very open about the causes of their sadness:

"I have moments when I get sad from everything...if I see something happening to someone in front of me...when someone is feeling bad ...it hurts, believe me..."

Like other mothers, they also mentioned loss and illness, and other daily hassles:

"Parting with someone makes me sad."

"When a child is sick I get sad."

"When I fail to accomplish something."

"... [when] We [spouses] don't have time to talk."

Anecdotally, it seemed that Romanian mothers conceive of emotions in terms of the polarity happiness-sadness.

Frequency and intensity of sadness.

American mothers asserted that their sadness was rare, but relatively intense when experienced. Hispanic-born mothers suggested that the frequency and intensity of their sadness depended on its cause:

"If...it is a big thing...it lasts."

"It depends on the problem."

"It can be fast, or it can last a long time..."

"[Duration] depends on what caused the sad feeling."

Two Hispanic-born mothers pointed out that they felt sad every day, and that the sadness could at times be intense.

Japanese-born parents agreed that the frequency and intensity of sadness depends on its causes; there were six mentions of this connection between temporal and intensive parameters of sadness and their causes. Their distinctions between the varying causes of sadness and its length of experience are exemplified by the following: "After good night sleep I won't feel sad anymore"; there were five similar comments about sadness' short duration. In contrast, two Japanese parents noted:

"If it is something personal matter like my friend is very ill the sadness will last for long."

"[Sadness lasts a long time if] I find myself regretting things I didn't do or I did."

"Being sad is time consuming."

In addition, however, they made a point, in four comments, to note that their sadness was not often experienced or expressed:

"After children were born, I don't have time to be sad."

"... Too busy to be sad."

"[Sadness] is a luxury item; like taking a bath by oneself."

Romanian mothers suggested that sadness' parameters are dependent on its cause, but that it is generally not experienced or expressed too often in their lives, or at least there is a habituation effect:

"I begin to get used to it and maybe I feel it less intensely because I am used to it."

"[Sadness lasts] for how long the problem is..."

"[Sadness is] quite rare."

"[I experience sadness] not very often. But it does occur sometimes."

"..Once a week, but I get over it very quickly ... maybe hours or minutes."

"The same day I can get over it. I think of something good, when I see [my son] or have a success."

One Romanian mother remarked on how she managed the intensity of sadness, with a very wise self-perception:

"With me, it lasts less and less now; I mean it lasts much less than it did five years ago. I make it go much more faster ... I think of the reason why I am sad and I analyze it and I come to the conclusion that I have no reason to be sad...I am practically over it."

Again, however, based on nonverbal cues from the group, focus group facilitators questioned these mothers' conscious awareness of their own sadness and its management.

Means of expressing sadness.

American mothers in diaries and interviews told us that they expressed their sadness via crying, or suppressing it and just talking about it. They considered it overall as somewhat positive in their lives, because it is after all a part of life, but acknowledged that its experience and expression can be difficult for everyone in their families. Hispanic mothers talked about crying, and that crying could help one in regulating sadness, as well as suppressing/escaping:

"You can communicate it by crying [if you trust the person who is with you]."

"When you cry you relieve your sadness."

"...reflected in each person's face."

"...one looks serious...does not talk."

"I escape...I try to isolate myself."

They were very articulate about means of regulating sadness' expression and experience:

"The things that make you feel better are spiritual."

"I go to church" ... "that makes me feel different."

They noted that one regulates sadness if one has a "strong character," and that another method is via distracting oneself:

"...if I get sad when I am alone in the apartment, I leave. What will I be doing enclosed within four walls...when I can feel the wind, the sound of any car's engine, or anything."

"One should be entertained with anything."

"Take your car and go; you try to forget your problems."

"If we see other people's problems, they are bigger than ours."

Two Hispanic-born mothers also highlighted the individuality inherent in how people deal with emotions (e.g., "We don't all react to our emotions in the same way").

In terms of sadness helping or hindering their lives, especially with their children, Hispanic-born parents thought, in general that it was helpful:

"Yes...and when one talks about it one feels relieved...one has solace...or an advice."

"...better to demonstrate that one is sad."

"...the best thing is to cry to vent...all of your sadness and worries."

One parent, however, asserted, of sadness, "It's not good...it's not good."

Japanese parents did not talk much about their expression of sadness (there was one mother who discussed crying, although the other parents were not as clear about this possible means of expression). In contrast they did mention sadness as helpful four times:

"When I'm sad, I'm sad. So it's good, isn't it?...But if I'm crying all the time, I don't think it's good for children."

"I'm not trying to show sad emotion to my children but I don't try to hide it, either." (this comment seemed a relatively equivocal mention of sadness as helpful)

"I think it's helping children enrich their emotion."

However, Japanese-born parents also made three mentions of sadness not helping – “it’s no use to cry.” In other ways these parents also downplayed the expression of sadness:

“It is no use telling other people.”

“Because we feel sad, we also enjoy happiness. If we are always happy, we may not understand what happy is.”

Romanian mothers also noted crying when sad, and that “it can be read on your face and you cannot hide it,” that it is “...an unpleasant feeling. A state of discomfort ... I don’t feel well.” One mother said that her sadness was evident via her words: “...’but what should I do?’ ‘Look what happened! ... ‘Oh dear’...!”

Several Romanian mothers also suggested that sadness needs regulation (e.g., “I try to overcome it”), particularly via distraction, talking (four mentions), turning to God, or isolating oneself:

“I find satisfaction in something else...I find other accomplishments... other activities...something more joyful.”

“...having a friend to talk to ... [although] I can’t spoil her day with my problems.”

“...tell children ‘leave me alone.’”

Romanian mothers made seven mentions of sadness helping, for example:

“I like to show my children that I am sad and show them that there are moments when you are sad and they learn to take part in my sadness....it exists, and when they confront it, I’d like them to be prepared.”

“...we have the right to be sad; it’s a common state at a given moment.”

“...helps us getting more close together [in our family relationships, even with children]”

However, these mothers also made 11 mentions of sadness not helping:

“You transmit your state to others.”

“I let myself be brought down.”

“It would be better to be glad all the time.”

“I think that it’s a vice and many times I have reproaches for myself because of that, because the persons near me feel the sadness too and he/she is not guilty for the thought in my mind and for my failures. I consider it a defect.”

“I think it’s a flaw of mine and I’m not trying to teach them this. I teach them to be happy and appreciate everything.”

“In those moments I feel like beating/punishing myself. And that’s because others do not deserve to be sad because of me.”

“...nothing is solved if you are sad.”

These mothers also evidenced other ambivalence, as well, about the experience and expression of sadness in their everyday lives:

“I try not to be sad.”

“I try to hide it as much as possible.”

“I don’t really show my feelings.”

In all, they made five references to hiding sadness, but also two references to not being able to hide their sadness (e.g., “I never wanted to express my sadness but they do read it on my face”). Perhaps the ambiguity about showing sadness stems from mothers’ beliefs that children should know about the sadness *they* cause, but

that otherwise it is not helpful for them to know about adults' sadness, so that on many occasions it remains hidden.

Explaining and apologizing for sadness.

American-born mothers were relatively likely to explain, but not apologize for, their sadness. Hispanic mothers were divided on explaining sadness to their children, and this division seemed to depend on the age of the child, with more agreement that one could explain sadness to one's older children:

"...children ask, and I tell them what's happening to me...children need to learn."

"[But it depends, as it may] make them mature too fast."

"You can't tell them everything ... say it with little words that they can understand."

"Adults can help you resolve the problem; however children can only listen and perhaps didn't even understand what one wanted to tell them."

"I don't tell anything to my little girl (4 year-old). I do tell my older daughter (9-year-old)."

Hispanic-born mothers mentioned apologizing for sadness only once ("...if I treat my daughter bad of course" [I apologize]).

Japanese parents noted that they explain sadness to their children:

"If it is something they can understand"...

"Moderately. I want my children to tell me when they are sad, so I try to explain them when I'm sad."

Romanian mothers made three mentions of explaining their sadness to children (e.g., "We start talking about what to do to be ok"). But six of seven Romanian mothers remarking on apologizing for sadness did say they were useful:

"I show my weakness and I take it upon myself and apologize."

"...to teach them to apologize whenever they transmit a negative state."

Also, there can be seen, to some of the Romanian mothers, a note of self-blaming about showing sadness to their children when it supposed not to.

Children's reactions to sadness.

American mothers indicated that their children comforted their sadness or had other reactions (unspecified) in about equal frequencies. Hispanic-born parents agreed that their children hug them and tell them not to worry when the adults are sad. Romanian mothers commented that their children "...ask me if I am upset." Japanese-born parents did not discuss this aspect.

Emotion Three: Anger

Causes of anger.

On their diaries, American mothers noted various forms of child behavior difficulties as being their most frequent reason for anger – including disobeying, sibling conflict, making a mess, and overactivity. About half of their interview responses suggested nonchild reasons for their anger.

Similarly, two Hispanic-born parents mentioned child disobedience (e.g., "My daughter likes to do what she wants and that makes me angry"). They also mentioned their spouse not helping with chores. Other reasons given were cruelty

(e.g., "if something is done to my daughters, then I get mad") and injustice (e.g., "they think you do not know anything; they walk all over me").

Japanese-born parents made one mention of their children's disobedience, but also twice mentioned being angry with themselves (e.g., "why didn't I do it at that time"; "regret"). At the same time, Japanese-born parents also noted several rather nonpersonal reasons for anger, such as other drivers and meaningless crimes watched on the news.

As with sadness, they made three "denials" or transformations of anger in their discussion:

"I scold my children when they misbehave, but in that case it is different from feeling angry."

"...Some kind of negative feelings, not anger necessarily."

"We don't bring out family problems outside; we avoid confrontation ... especially about interpersonal problems."

Romanian mothers also talked about other frustrations that could cause their anger – their children's disobedience, and their spouse's inattention, and seemed to stress cruelty, injustice, or unfairness in their world:

"...my children make fun of everything...destroy something...throw food on the floor."

"Lies, impertinence."

"Because my husband is absent-minded sometimes."

"I get angry when there is injustice being done to me."

"[Someone] doesn't trust what I say."

"I know I did a good deed and it is disregarded."

Frequency and intensity.

American mothers reported frequent, fairly intense anger. Hispanic-born parents agreed, but gave more nuanced discussion of how these parameters might depend on circumstances, or the individual experiencing the anger:

"We do get mad very often, that is natural."

"...I can easily get angry and it lasts a long time."

"...when the kids do not obey or something...I think that is not intense anger."

"You forget with your husband because of that mutual love, but with other people you don't forget and you remain angry with them."

"It tends to disappear as long as you have a conversation with your husband."

"When I get angry it goes away fast... [but] my husband likes to keep things..."

Japanese-born parents made several contradictory statements – they would stay angry for a long time about U.S. presidential election, but their anger toward a bad driver is short-lived. Ultimately, they seemed to agree that anger was usually short in duration (e.g., "Nothing lasts long"). In contrast, the Japanese-born parents considered that anger happened relatively "often... I feel anger at least 15 times a day."

Romanian mothers, however, mostly agreed that they rarely got angry (e.g., "Once in one or two weeks..."), and that when they did it was of relatively short duration (five mentions) even if intense:

"Sometimes.....I feel it like a burst...about a minute, maybe not even so much."

“...with the children, I don't let the anger stay inside me.”

Although these mothers often have reasons to feel angry (at least as many as any other mothers!), their anger seems rather nuanced and of low frequency; perhaps Romanian mothers have developed a high tolerance for frustration.

Means of expressing anger.

American mothers discussed about equal proportions of yelling or other negative expression of anger and more positive, rational means, such as discussing and explaining. Hispanic-born parents noted that “when you keep it inside it is not good,” but that regulation is necessary, for example:

“I am very explosive; therefore, I am very careful when I get mad, especially with my husband. I am careful of not saying things that I might regret. And with my daughters, also. Suddenly, I say, “grrrr...”, but suddenly I have to control myself.”

These parents mentioned anger as helpful six times, but particularly with certain caveats:

“I think that it is a virtue, if every time that you show it, you do not hurt people. Then, that you express that you are mad but at the same time you show respect and maintain your position on what you are doing and saying.”

“If you do not express it, then people say, “we did it once and since they did not get mad.... Then we can do the same thing...”

“[Anger may] teach people that they can't walk all over you.”

“You should accept when one is mad about things. Then things will be straightened [out].”

They also noted that the implications of their anger may depend on with whom they are angry:

“...with my mother, with whom I cannot get mad because if I get mad with her I think that that means that I am not well-behaved. Now, if I get mad with my boyfriend, I think that that means that I am expressing my rights. If I get mad with my brother it means that I do not love my little brother and that is a sin not to love him.”

Furthermore, they were clear in their belief that anger needs regulation:

“That is not a virtue [if you get mad, throw things]; it is illness.”

“...when we are dumb because of our anger we have to carry it in our conscience because we think that we had made the other person feel bad because of our anger.”

“Self-control... thinking about the consequences. I, for example, am very impulsive. When I get angry, I know that I can say a lot of things. But, I do not say them because I think before I do something.”

“You have to know how to get angry because your children imitate what parents do... It is very important to have control because they look at you.”

The Japanese-born parents also considered anger's helpfulness to be dependent on the situation, but as has been already noted, some depersonalized their discussion:

“If you use the anger for positive reasons, such as sports, it's good, but if the anger drives the person into terrorist activities, it's a problem.”

They did consider that anger needs regulation:

“I choose an inexpensive stuff like a tissue box to throw when I am angry.”

"Often I want to yell at my husband but I try not to."

Romanian mothers noted, five times, negative means of expressing their anger, which were highly dependent on the cause of the anger. For example:

"I start shouting, throwing, mostly shouting."

"I raise my voice or slap the children."

"I say words that are not proper."

On the other hand, they mentioned positive ways of expressing anger three times, such as "...my voice becomes more firm."

Of note were these mothers' five mentions of their guilty feelings about their anger, such as "I always reproach myself." Moreover, four comments were made about anger not being helpful,

"... [anger is] reacting in a way I don't like. But sometimes I see no other way.

This is the way the children seem to understand."

They also considered that whether anger is helpful might depend on the perspective taken, as follows:

"Many times, acting out for a short while helps you: children get scared, they calm down, the problem is temporarily solved."

Finally, Romanian mothers discussed the need for regulating anger six times, such as "There are reasons for you to get angry, but you have to control the situation."

Explaining and apologizing for anger.

American mothers endorsed both explaining and apologizing for their anger. Hispanic-born parents were not as clear about the explanation dimension; one Hispanic-born mother did note that she apologized.

Interestingly, Japanese parents discussed explaining *other's* anger (e.g., the child's own anger: "he starts throwing temper tantrum. A time like this, I explain to him that he needs to take turns"; "...when I'm driving and see a bad driver, I'll tell Adam "He's stupid").

Three different Romanian mothers were affirmative about apologizing for their anger, and discussed explaining anger in a rather detailed way (e.g., "I try to explain the children closer to their understanding in comparison to adults").

Children's reactions to anger.

American mothers noted relatively equivalent frequencies of children's crying, matching anger, ignoring it, and complying with the angry parent's wishes. Hispanic-born parents suggested that their children become compliant in the face of parental anger:

"If she knows I am mad, she tries to apologize for what made me feel like that."

"[he says,] 'I will not do it again'."

Japanese-born parents discussed their children taking sides if they saw their parents arguing, or trying to be mediator; these are, respectively, matching and compliant responses.

Romanian mothers mentioned compliance, as well:

"[my daughter] stops immediately, thinks about what she has done, and tries to solve the situation."

"And the moment they see I am very angry, they somehow "freeze" and get back. They calm down, stop the commentaries..."

They also noted anger matching in their children, as follows, or, at the very least, exacerbating parental anger:

"[my son] acts exactly the opposite way, he shouts back at me."

"My children, it may be the age, but generally when I get angry at home, they know the reasons that made me angry, and they seem to try to push the limit... so I tell them that they can't do that, they can't do the other one, they insist, I tell them to be careful because I already told them 4 times and the 5th time I would spank them and not explain any more."

In contrast, one mother noted a more fearful reaction, "There is a total silence. They become inhibited and that's not good." All these responses were linked to the utility of emotions.

Discussion

Parents who are good "emotion coaches", at least in the United States, accept children's experiences of emotion and their expression of emotions that do not harm others; they empathize with and validate emotions. Emotional moments are seen as opportunities for intimacy (Denham & Kochanoff, 2002; Eisenberg & Fabes, 1994; Eisenberg et al., 1996; Eisenberg et al., 1999; Gottman, Katz, & Hooven, 1996; Jones et al., 2002). Living in a particular "affective climate" promotes experience and expression of specific emotions, such as anger or sadness, and may also contribute to differing patterns of overall emotional expressiveness, as well (Halberstadt, Crisp, & Eaton, 1999; Halberstadt, Fox, & Jones, 1993).

Where do such statements lead us, however? Although there may be some universally beneficial socialization of emotion techniques, we must be able to pinpoint precisely those aspects of parenting that may enhance child adjustment across cultural or subcultural/ethnic groups (Garner & Spears, 2000; Jones & Garner, 1998), and those whose effects may be dependent on the cultural context in which they take place (McCoy, 2002). When the correct cultural lens is in place, practices that we might evaluate negatively (or positively) are seen in clearer relief (Cole & Tamang, 1996), and a more complete story can be told. For just these reasons, and because we believe that we must begin with parent's *own* emotions and their beliefs about them when studying socialization of emotions, we intended this study and the narrative data that forms its foundation to be a beginning attempt to broaden our understanding of the socialization of emotional competence. In integrating the qualitative data that so enriches such understanding, we will examine similarities and differences between and within the cultural groups with whom we talked. Unfortunately, we must only graze the surface of the rich detail imparted by the parents, however.

Causes of Emotions

In accordance with Matsumoto and colleagues (Matsumoto et al., 1988), we found that our data show a high degree of cultural agreement concerning many

aspects of the antecedent/evaluation process, and suggest a large degree of universality in emotional experience. Happiness was often caused by one's children and their endearing behavior, or by goal attainment, sadness was often caused by loss, loneliness, and daily hassles, and anger was often caused by children's difficult behavior, one's spouse, and injustice. Where differences were seen, these are relatively easily explained by understanding the culture in which the parents reside. For example, Hispanic-born parents, coming from an interdependent culture that stresses the value of the family (Fracasso & Busch-Rossnagel, 1992), had more to say about loneliness and distance from family, as well as the difficulty of the immigrant experience because of these facts. And, arguably, the Hispanic-born and Romanian parents have more exposure to hardship and injustice, so that it is not surprising that they mentioned these issues more than other parents. Also, maybe externalization of emotions is more common in these two cultures; that is, both are "latin", with Romanians temperamentally similar to people of Italian or Spanish descent. At the same time, our findings are very concordant with those of Rughinis (2002), who reported that Romanians and Bulgarians value having children and a stable relationship with their partner as major reasons for their happiness. Like Rughinis, however, our study also confirms the existence of high intra-cultural variability in the causes of parents' emotions.

One issue that came to light even as early as discussion of causes of emotions in the Japanese-born group should, however, be mentioned – this was the only group who asserted that discussing emotions was difficult. This difficulty was demonstrated by the parents' relative distancing from the task; for example, they subtly impersonalized the task, as evidenced by a lengthy discussion of eating. This subtle impersonalization continued for the Japanese-born parents, to one degree or another, throughout the focus groups.

In any case, along with prominent emotions researchers (Matsumoto et al., 1988; Scherer, 1997; Scherer & Wallbott, 1994), our results suggest differences between specific emotions in terms of causes, but relative universality of the appraisal and antecedent/evaluation processes. Of course, our results require more experimental proofs. Nonetheless, from the current work we can hypothesize that people from different cultures may agree broadly on the antecedents of certain emotions, and may appraise many situations in accord with these commonly held antecedents of particular emotions (Mesquita & Ellsworth, 2001). In general, then, it would seem that anyone seeking to create means of teaching parents about how their emotions affect their children would at least begin with a common lexicon about the nature of these three common emotions. We may be able to talk about the experience of emotions, at least to an extent, using a common language (Kobayashi, Schallert, & Ogren, 2003). In support of this view, Church and colleagues (Church et al., 1998) found cross-cultural comparability of emotion concepts and experience, rather than support for a strong social constructivist view. Nonetheless, a more balanced view might be that social constructivism should not be ignored altogether, given the within-culture differences we did find, and the possibility of bias with such restricted samples of parents.

At the same time, cultural differences in appraisal and emotion may also be due to differences in the salience or accessibility of particular appraisal dimensions; what are the differing, particular concerns associated with specific parental emotions in differing cultures (Dix, 1991; Mesquita & Karasawa, 2002)? One of the hallmarks of cultural psychology's explanation about cultural difference is in terms of the centrality of different concerns to the "selfways" of different cultures. For example, American selfways are often characterized as independent, marked by promotions of one's own goals, and distinction from others. In contrast, Japanese selfways described as more interdependent, which motivates their desires to fit in, belong, be appropriate in action, and promote common goals. Hispanic self-ways also have been described as interdependent, but with specific emphases on familism and respect (Fracasso & Busch-Rossnagel, 1992; Harwood et al., 2002). Thus, for example, Japanese parents discussed not showing happiness if it would be at the expense of others in the group (see also Dennis et al., 2002). Hispanic-born parents mentioned their distance from families of origin as unique causes for their sadness, distinct from more general loneliness mentioned by parents from several cultural groups.²

Romanian culture is also mainly interdependent, but in transition to a more independent model; this could generate within-group variability, as some parents still think in an interdependent way, while others already have an independent attitude towards relationships.

Finally, we cannot forget that there are striking within-culture differences even in terms of showing emotions and several of the other parameters discussed.

Means of Expressing Emotions

Despite the similarities across cultural groups in the causes of the parents' emotions, it is important to note the existence of somewhat culturally-specific means of expressing emotion. Others have found profiles of cross-culturally stable differences among the emotions with respect to reactive/expressive aspects of the emotion – subjective feeling, physiological symptoms, and expressive behavior, as well as display rules (de Carvalho, 2003; Efenbein & Ambady, 2003; Matsumoto & Ekman, 1989; Matsumoto et al., 1998; Scherer & Wallbott, 1994), and these are indeed areas in which we found more differences.

In particular, the Japanese parents stressed not wanting to show emotions, or again downplayed their means of expressing emotions, whereas as American, Hispanic-born, and Romanian parents seemed to feel more openness in this area. However, both Hispanic-born and Romanian parents stressed something that had not been evidence in our interviews and diary methods with American mothers – that one would express some emotions, such as happiness, differently with children and adults. Turning specifically to the expression of sadness, both Hispanic and Romanian parents discussed distraction as a means of regulating, and Romanian

² It should be noted that these analyses of selfways should not be taken as rigid (Takano & Osaka, 1999); for example, Schulze and colleagues (Schulze et al., 2002) found that independence need not solely be associated with the values of mothers from individualistic cultures.

mothers in particular were ambivalent about whether sadness is helpful or not (cf. Baban, 2000, who noted far less self-report crying in Romanians than in citizens of 30 other nations). As for anger, Romanian mothers, as well as Hispanic parents, talked about possible negative means of expression, and their subsequent need to regulate their anger in the presence of their children.

Intensity and Frequency of Emotions

The parents studied in these focus groups talked in articulate ways about the factors impacting the intensity and frequency of their emotions. Thus, Romanian mothers talked about being happy often and intensely, whereas Hispanic parents spoke vividly about the frequency and intensity of their negative emotions. And, although Romanian mothers talked a lot about dealing with their anger, it seemed to be relatively infrequent. They are more often sad than angry.

Perhaps even more important was the fact that parents in the focus groups discussed that intensity and frequency of emotions are dependent on their causes – including the Japanese parents, who seemed not to want to show interpersonal anger. Such a nuanced approach to emotion could be communicated well to children, with positive effects.

Explaining and Apologizing for Emotions

One of the tenets of the “emotion coaching” literature is that it can be helpful to explain emotions to children, both in terms of contributions to their understanding of emotion and their own emotional expressiveness (Denham & Kochanoff, 2002). But is this value universally enacted by parents? It appeared that many of these parents endorsed explaining emotions, at least to some degree, and more than apologizing. Perhaps the issue of their children’s developmental level, both in terms of their ability and need to understand emotions, brought up by several parents, overrode any cultural differences.

Children’s Reactions to Emotions

We were struck by the cross-cultural commonality of ways in which younger children react to their parents’ happiness, sadness, and anger. The picture emerges of often similar reasons for various emotions, rather different (although not universally so) ways of expressing them, but rather stable ways that children “take in” their parents’ emotions when and if they are expressed.

Implications of Knowing Differing Cultures’ Socialization of Emotion Techniques

In our interview study (Denham & Grout, 1992), we found that mothers’ sadness was related to their children’s emotion knowledge, several maternal emotions were related to their child’s emotions in the preschool classroom. Moreover, mothers’ anger, if caused by disobedience and high frequency, was related to child sadness. Finally, mothers’ personal happiness, explained sadness,

and less frequent, explained anger were all related child's prosocial reactions to others' emotions. We are eager to understand how such parameters of parental emotion may relate to young children's emotional competence across cultural groups. We might expect differences as well as similarities, with parents from these cultural groups, compared to our American sample.

Two examples come readily to mind. First, it would seem likely that many of these findings might *not* obtain for the Japanese parents and their children. Their ways of experiencing and judging emotion seemed different enough, that more culture-specific hypotheses may be required, such as parents' discussion of collectivist notions of happiness relating to children's more appropriate displays of such happiness. Second, Romanian mothers' seeming ambivalence about the helpfulness of the two negative emotions, and their regulation, might be reflected in their own children's expressiveness of these emotions.³

Conclusions and Future Directions

Where might we go from here in studying socialization of emotion in a more culturally-anchored manner? First, we have data on excitement, tension/fear, and pride from the Hispanic-born and Romanian focus groups, which could be very illuminating but were beyond our page limitations to explore in this study. Next, we would like to move on to discussion with these groups not about their own, parental emotions, but about their children's emotions and how the parents react to and teach about them.

Finally, we must acknowledge limitations of small, qualitatively-based data set while taking advantage of its richness. It is true that there were relatively few parents in this study, and that having different facilitators for each group could be a strength, in that each group was led by a native speaker and culture member, but also a weakness, if any one facilitator behaved in a unique, nonstandard way. We think, however, that our standard focus group procedures (see Appendix) help obviate this potential problem. Several criteria for qualitative research, including investigative depth, interpretive accuracy, and illuminative fertility (Shank & Vilella, 2004), seem to be at least minimally met here. Moreover, we need to move flexibly between valuable qualitative inquiries and more standard quantitative methodologies in our search for understanding on this vital topic, so important to the child's social and academic success, well-being, and even mental health.

³ We think this is not real ambivalence, but rather an effect of the heterogeneity of our sample, in terms of utility/desirability of showing particular emotions.

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Appendix

Focus Groups' "Scripts"

I. Session I

A. Opening Remarks & Welcome

We tried to make everyone aware that at this time everyone is comfortable with these sessions *being tape-recorded*. It is really important for us to do this in order to learn the most we possibly can from this group of parents. Our purpose for coming here and bringing this group together is to learn about how emotions in our lives really feel, what kinds of situations bring about feeling certain emotions, and how we share our emotional lives with our children.

There are no wrong or right answers in our discussions, but we do need to stay on track in talking about emotions. Specifically, the type of responses we're hoping for are really focusing on the emotions and the roles they play in our lives. The kind of responses that might be a little off track or that we should try to avoid is talking about a particular behavior problem or discipline situation. For example...

We want to stress the confidentiality of this meeting. The things that we say in our discussion today and in the future will not leave the room unless we perceive that a comment presents itself as a threat to a child. You can leave at any time if you are uncomfortable.

B. Warm Up Game: Pass around pictures of each person's children and tell us about them, i.e. names, ages, interests...

C. Discussion

I. Guidelines:

- a) Preface questions... e.g. "This next question may seem a bit difficult to answer. Remember, there are no wrong answers."
 - b) Go around the room and ask each person to answer the first couple questions — try to get everyone involved and comfortable talking.
 - c) May want to ask if answers differ between public and private situations.
2. Happiness (questions were the same for SADNESS and ANGER)
- a) What makes you feel HAPPY? Give example of a situation.
 - b) How often do you feel HAPPY?
 - c) How long does your HAPPINESS typically last? Do you feel as though you need to "get over" your HAPPINESS and get on an even keel? [Note: get to parent regulation].
 - d) What does being HAPPY mean to you? What do you think it says about you?
 - e) Is showing HAPPINESS a vice or virtue? A sign of weakness or strength?
 - f) How do you communicate HAPPINESS to other people appropriately? Inappropriately?
 - g) Is there a difference (i.e. intensity) in how you communicate HAPPINESS to children versus other adults? Younger children versus older children?
 - h) How do children react to your HAPPINESS? Younger versus older children?
 - i) How do you feel about yourself as a parent when you show HAPPINESS?
 - j) How do you feel when your child shows HAPPINESS?
 - k) Do your feelings and demonstrations of HAPPINESS help or hinder situations with children?
 - l) Do you ever apologize for showing HAPPINESS or explain it to your children in any way? Younger versus older children? If so, why? If not, why not.
 - m) Define HAPPINESS. What does it feel like to you physically? Describe how it feels.