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Early socialization of prosocial behavior: Patterns in parents' encouragement of toddlers' helping in an everyday household task

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Abstract

Patterns in parents' socialization of prosocial behavior in 18- and 24-month-olds ($n=46$) were investigated during an everyday household chore that parents were asked to complete with their toddlers. Two socialization approaches were distinguished, one focused on specific requests for concrete actions needed to complete an immediate, concrete goal ("action-oriented"), and a second focused on the more abstract needs and emotions of the parent and the child's role as a helper ("need-oriented"). Parents were equally active at both ages in trying to elicit children's help but used different strategies with younger and older toddlers. With 18-month-olds they used more action-oriented approaches, whereas with 24-month-olds they increased their use of need-oriented approaches. They also regulated the attention of younger toddlers more, and more often socially approved older toddlers' helping. Thus, how parents prompt, support, and encourage prosocial behavior changes over the second year from utilizing primarily concrete, goal-directed requests in the service of the immediate task, to increasingly emphasizing more abstract needs and emotions of the recipient and the child's role as a helper.

Keywords

socialization; prosocial behavior; helping; toddlers; social approval

1 Introduction

Prosocial behavior, voluntarily acting on behalf of others out of caring and concern, is a core component of childhood social competence and healthy adjustment (Eisenberg, Fabes, & Spinrad, 2006). Although prosocial behavior is known to emerge in the second year of life

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(Brownell & Carriger, 1990; Brownell et al., 2009; Dunfield et al., 2011; Svetlova et al., 2010; Warneken & Tomasello, 2006; Zahn-Waxler et al., 1992), its developmental origins are not yet well understood. In a recent review of theoretical approaches to the early development of prosociality, Paulus (2014) includes, among others, “social interaction” models in which children engage in prosocial behavior to experience the pleasure generated by interacting with others, and “social normative” models in which the social environment supports and fosters prosocial behavior. The conceptualization underlying the current study aligns with both of these, emphasizing the social origins of prosocial behavior rather than the social-cognitive underpinnings, which are important as well (Brownell, Nichols, & Svetlova, 2013; Paulus, 2014; Vaish & Warneken, 2012).

Whereas much of the previous work on early socialization of prosocial behavior has focused on individual differences in global parenting style, such as sensitivity or responsiveness, we were interested in the process of socialization, i.e., the specific behaviors and strategies that parents use with young children to support and encourage prosociality and how these change over the second year as prosocial behavior emerges and becomes more autonomous. We thus examined how parents encouraged toddlers’ helping during a common household chore that could be undertaken together.

1.1 Socialization of Prosocial Behavior in Early Development

The current study is grounded on the premise that very early socialization of prosocial behavior trades on young children’s fundamental affiliative motives. Baumeister & Leary (1995) proposed that humans have an essential need to form and maintain close social relationships; that such relationships involve affective concern and caring for one another’s welfare; and that this core interpersonal motive influences much of human thought, emotion, and behavior. Bowlby (1969) similarly argued that young infants possess a basic motive for affiliation, which fosters their behavior and relationships. Despite differences in rearing, temperament, and attachment history, typically developing infants want to engage socially and emotionally with others. Investigators from a variety of perspectives have shown that such affiliative motives promote interdependence and shared goals, social emotions, and other-regarding orientation, all of which contribute to prosocial action (Carpendale, Kettner, & Audet, 2014; Dahl, Campos & Witherington, 2011; de Waal, 2008; Hobson, Harris, García-Pérez, & Hobson, 2009; Hrdy, 2001; Kochanska, 2002; Laible & Thompson, 2000; Rheingold, 1982; Stern, 1977; Tomasello, Carpenter, Call, Behne, & Moll, 2005; Trevarthen & Aitken, 2001).

If prosocial behavior is rooted in affiliative motives and young children are inclined to participate in joint, affiliative activity with their parents, then parents’ socialization of prosociality may both reflect and build on these motives. That is, rather than attempting to teach prosociality outright to very young children, for example by telling children to help or by reinforcing particular instances of it (Warneken & Tomasello, 2008; 2013), parents may instead stimulate and encourage it by capitalizing on their children’s affiliativeness to create situations where they can work together toward other-oriented goals. In an early classic study, Rheingold (1982) found that 18- to 30-month-old toddlers readily participated together with parents in household chores such as setting the table or sweeping up bits of

paper, becoming involved in more than 60% of the parents' activities. Children thereby learn by doing, becoming prosocial by participating together in parent-led prosocial activity, motivated by affiliation, before they explicitly intend to help or are aware of their role as a helper.

A small body of empirical research is consistent with this conceptualization. For example, Hammond (2011) found that mothers who included their 18- to 24-month-old toddlers in a cooperative clean-up activity after joint play had children who were later more likely to help an experimenter. In several longitudinal studies, Kochanska and her colleagues have found that when mothers and toddlers routinely engage in positive, mutually responsive affiliative activity, their children exhibit greater prosocial behavior starting in their second year and develop a stronger moral conscience (Kochanska, 2002). Finally, when 18-month-old toddlers were primed experimentally with photos depicting affiliative interactions, such as dolls hugging or holding hands, they were subsequently more likely to help an adult (Over & Carpenter, 2009). Thus, affiliative activity appears to motivate prosocial action in very young children. However, questions remain as to how parents use their young children's desire to affiliate in the service of promoting prosocial behavior.

Notably, across the childhood years, helping parents at home is related to children's prosocial behavior (Goodnow, 1988). For example, Hammond (2011) found that the more household chores 18 – 24-month-old toddlers participated in at home, the more often they helped an unfamiliar adult in the lab. Similarly, parents who expect their 2- and 3-year olds to behave prosocially in the family context, such as helping parents and participating in household chores, have children who are more socially competent later in childhood, including being more prosocial (Baumrind, 1971). Among pre-adolescents, assignment of household chores that involve other-oriented family care, such as helping in the garden or feeding pets, relates to spontaneous prosocial behavior (Grusec, Goodnow, & Cohen, 1996). We thus examine parents' socialization strategies in the context of a household chore, laundry-hanging.

Because effective socialization practices must accommodate to the child's developmental competence, we expect that parents' socialization of prosociality should change with the child's age and accompanying growth in emotion understanding, self-awareness, perspective taking, emotion regulation, and other capacities relevant to prosocial responding. A key developmental shift in early prosocial behavior is from children's ability to engage in "instrumental," action-based helping behavior early in the second year to "empathic," emotion-based helping later in the second and third years (Svetlova, et al, 2010). Instrumental helping is primarily about assisting others with achieving their action-based goals, whereas empathic helping refers to efforts to alleviate another's negative affective state. For example, 14-18 month old toddlers will help an adult by picking up something he has dropped or misplaced (Warneken & Tomasello, 2007), and by 24-30 months of age they can help someone who is sad or cold by giving them what they need to feel better (Svetlova, et al., 2010). Corresponding to the developmental change in these forms of helping, parents would be expected to adopt a more concrete action-based, goal-oriented, and task-specific approach early in the second year that would support and encourage children's instrumental helping; later in the second year they would be expected to integrate a more indirect and

abstract, need-oriented approach and a greater focus on the parent's emotions and how the child's behavior might be helpful in responding to them in support of the transition to empathic, emotion-based helping. We test this hypothesis in the current study with 18- and 24-month old toddlers.

1.2 Regulating and Reinforcing Children's Behavior

In addition to employing strategies meant to elicit and support prosocial responding, parents are also likely to regulate their toddlers' attention and behavior to assist children in maintaining focus on the situation and the parent's need. Particularly with young children, parents may need to be more explicit in drawing the child's attention to the task and the desired behavior, including using gestures to communicate intent and enhance task salience (Wu & Coulson, 2007). Rheingold (1982) found that parents' directing and maintaining toddlers' attention to household tasks was positively correlated with rates of participation in those tasks. In the current study we expected that such attention-directing behavior would be used more frequently with younger toddlers because of their more limited attentional and regulatory control.

Parents also socially reinforce young children's helping behavior, thanking and praising them for helping both in the home (Dahl, Schuck, Hung, Hsieh, & Campos, 2012) and in the laboratory (Eisenberg, Wolchik, Goldberg, & Engel, 1992; Rheingold, 1982). Although one recent study found that material rewards reduced toddlers' helping (Warneken & Tomasello, 2008), verbal encouragement did not (Warneken & Tomasello, 2013). In an early study of social reinforcement of prosocial behavior, parents' praise of 1- and 2-year olds' prosocial behavior during a play session was positively related to the children's prosociality with the parent during the session (Eisenberg, et al., 1992). Social approval may be especially effective in the context of joint activity where parents may use it to scaffold mastery by informing the child that helping behavior is desirable and encouraging the child to repeat or continue such behavior. We thus expected that praise and social approval would be used by parents at both ages.

1.3 The Current Study

The aim of the current study was to identify how parents encourage, elicit, and maintain their toddlers' helping behavior during a joint activity in which the parent needs assistance, and how parents' socialization efforts change over early development as prosocial responding begins to become more abstract, need oriented, and autonomous. Eighteen- and 24-month old children were observed with their parents during an everyday household task adapted from previous research on toddlers' participation in household routines (Rheingold, 1982) and their helping behavior in a lab task (Warneken & Tomasello, 2006). A laundry-hanging task required parents to use clothespins to fasten 'laundry' (cloth napkins) to a clothesline. Parents were encouraged to get their children to participate but were not told how to do so. The task was arranged to make it somewhat effortful for parents, thus providing meaningful opportunities for the parent to request help.

Parents' naturally-occurring strategies for soliciting and maintaining toddlers' helping behavior were recorded. Use of concrete, action-oriented approaches that took the form of

directives and explicit requests were distinguished from more abstract need-oriented approaches that communicated the parent's emotional state and general need for help or the value of the child's role as a helper to the parent. Parents' efforts to focus children's attention on the task and their social approval and praise were also observed. Because individual differences in children's compliance or language skill, especially emotion vocabulary, might affect parents' behavior above and beyond age-related contributors, these were controlled.

We hypothesized that parents would initially emphasize concrete goals and the specific actions needed to accomplish them, directing children's immediate, task-related behavior accordingly; and that with age, as children become more sensitive to others' internal states and able to infer and act upon them, and become more aware of their role as a helper, parents would increasingly emphasize more abstract emotional states and needs, thereby conveying not only what must be done but also why.

2 Method

2.1 Participants

Forty-six typically developing 18- and 24-month-old infants and their parents participated. Nineteen children (10 male; 9 female) were 18 months old (within one month) and twenty-seven children (15 male; 12 female) were 24 months old (within one month). The unequal n's result from the fact that children were drawn from two larger studies of early prosocial behavior with different numbers of participants. Families were recruited by mail and phone from a medium-sized US city. The majority of the parents were mothers; four fathers participated. The sample was predominantly Caucasian (71.7%; 2.2% African-American; 8.7% biracial; 4.3% other; 13% did not report race/ethnicity). Most of the parents were well-educated (88% had a bachelors degree or above) and were middle class (87% made more than \$50,000) by parental report.

2.2 Procedure

Procedures took place in a large playroom (14.5 feet × 10 feet) with a one-way mirror across one end through which the session was video-recorded. The parent-child helping task was adapted from Rheingold's (1982) study of helping with everyday chores and Warneken and Tomasello's (2006) "clothespin" helping task; both were used to study prosocial behavior in toddlers between 14 and 30 months of age. A box of cloth napkins was placed at one end of the room and a clothesline was placed at the other end of the room. Clothespins were placed in a bucket in the middle of the room, between the cloths and the clothesline. The spacing between task components provided natural opportunities for parents to request help. The clothesline was just out of the children's reach so that parents, not children, had to do the clipping and so that the child could not complete the task alone.

The experimenter explained and demonstrated the task to the parents. Parents were asked to get their children to participate in the chore as they would at home. To encourage parents to engage their children in the helping activity and not simply to complete the task by themselves, E pointed out the spacing and indicated that the task was meant to be somewhat challenging because the cloths were all the way across the room and the clips were in a

separate location. After the demonstration the experimenter left the room. A distracter toy remained in the room from the previous play period to provide an alternative activity for the child so that engaging with the parent in hanging the laundry wasn't the only option. The parent and child were given approximately four minutes to complete the task. Children were, on the whole, helpful when parents requested it, helping on 73% of episodes, on average, and only 2 children never helped. Thus, we did not analyze child behavior.

2.3 Measures

2.3.1 Parental behavior—Videos were coded for the frequency of verbal and nonverbal behaviors that parents used to encourage their children to help. These were categorized as either *concrete action-oriented* or *abstract need-oriented*, representing conceptually distinct approaches for engaging children in the helping task and encouraging their assistance. Concrete action-oriented approaches focused on completing specific elements of the task, engaging and scaffolding the child's participation via compliance with particular task-oriented actions. These included commands and requests for individual actions (“Get a clip”; pointing) as well as joint actions (“Let's get the clips together”; picking the child up to place a cloth on the line). Abstract need-oriented approaches were more indirect, and focused on the parent's general need for help rather than on specific behaviors. They emphasized the parent's need or emotion and/or the child's agency or role as a helper in alleviating the need (“This is so much work;” “I could really use your help;” walking slowly or heavily to emphasize difficulty or fatigue) without indicating or requesting specific helping actions.

Parents' efforts to regulate children's attention to the task and their social approval of helping behavior were also coded. *Attention eliciting* behaviors oriented the child's attention to the parent or to the task without soliciting or encouraging helping specifically (e.g., calling the child's name). *Social approval* was a positive response to children's helping or attempting to help with either physical (hugs, high fives) or verbal (thanking, praise) behavior.

These behavioral codes were mutually exclusive. The first author and an undergraduate research assistant coded all the videos. Reliability was established on 20% of the records prior to coding independently (Kappa = .96 overall, and .98 for concrete action-oriented vs. abstract need-oriented categories). Disagreements were resolved through consensus. Because there were slight variations in how long dyads took to complete the task, frequencies were adjusted for the total time they spent on the task to yield rates per minute.

2.3.2 Child characteristics—Several individual differences in children that might influence parents' behavior were assessed as potential covariates: language comprehension, emotion vocabulary, task engagement, and compliance. Mothers completed the MacArthur Communicative Development Inventory (CDI; Fenson et al., 2000) to assess verbal comprehension. Children were scored 1 for each word they could understand or say. Scores ranged from 26 to 89 ($M = 73.31$, $SD = 16.35$). Children's emotion vocabulary was measured using the Emotion Words Checklist (EWCL; Brownell, Ramani, & Zerwas, 2006). Parents reported how often, in the last 6 months, their child had said 29 common emotion words (0 = never used; 3 = often used). Scores ranged from 0 to 52 ($M = 18.16$; $SD = 15.29$).

Children's EWCL scores were correlated with their CDI scores, $r = .66, p < .001$; partial r (controlling for age) = .45, $p = .005$.

Children's task engagement and overall compliance were also rated over the entire session. Engagement was rated on a five point Likert scale (1 = not engaged to 5 = high engagement; NICHD Early Child Care-Research Network, 1999) with a rating of 5 for consistent, spontaneous interest and attention to the task or parent throughout the session; 1 was scored when children ignored the parent or only played with the distracter toy ($M = 3.40$; $SD = 1.51$). Note that children could be engaged without being helpful. For example, a child who routinely followed the parent about or consistently attended to the parent's behavior would receive a high engagement score even if there was no task-related helping behavior. Children's compliance was also rated on a five point Likert scale (1 = not at all characteristic to 5 = highly characteristic; NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 1999). All parents made requests of their children, some task-related and some not (e.g., "stop running around," "put that down"). A rating of 5 was given to children who complied with nearly every parental request and did so willingly and promptly, whereas a rating of 1 was given to children who never or almost never complied ($M = 3.13$; $SD = 1.60$). The intraclass correlation between independent coders was 96.40% for engagement, and 92.20% for compliance. Because engagement and compliance scores were highly correlated ($r = .95$), they were averaged to create a composite score of willing engagement for use in analyses ($M = 3.26$; $SD = 1.53$). The composite reflects children's spontaneous interest and engagement in the parents' activity and willingness to be guided by the parent.

3 Results

3.1 Preliminary analyses

Older children scored significantly higher on verbal comprehension (24 months: $M = 79.52$; 18 months: $M = 56.08$); emotion vocabulary (24 months: $M = 23.89$; 18 months: $M = 4.09$); and willing engagement (24 months: $M = 3.76$; 18 months: $M = 2.55$) (all F 's > 8.0 , all p 's $< .01$). There were also significant gender effects for willing engagement (males: $M = 2.84$; females: $M = 3.76$) and emotion vocabulary (males: $M = 13.50$; females: $M = 23.33$), with girls scoring higher in both (F 's > 4.0 , p 's $< .05$). Neither verbal comprehension nor emotion vocabulary was related to parent behavior after controlling for age and gender. However, willing engagement was marginally associated with rates of action-oriented socialization approaches (partial $r = .26, p = .09$) and social approval (partial $r = .73, p < .001$). Substantive analyses thus controlled for willing engagement.

3.2 Parent Socialization Approaches

Parents used a variety of strategies to encourage their children to help. Most parents used both concrete action-oriented (97.8%) and abstract need-oriented (100%) approaches at least once, as well as attention-eliciting behavior (93.5%) and social approval (91.3%) at least once. However, the various approaches were used at different rates.

To examine age differences in the rates of parental behavior, a repeated measures ANCOVA was conducted with strategy type (concrete action-oriented vs. abstract need-oriented) as the

within-subjects factor and age as the between subjects factor, controlling for willing engagement. Means are shown in Table 1. There were no main effects for children's age on parents' behavior, indicating that parents did not make more efforts to encourage helping at one age than the other. However, as shown in Figure 1, age and approach type interacted, $F(1, 43) = 7.40, p = .009$. In support of the primary hypothesis, post-hoc comparisons showed that parents of 18-month olds used concrete action-oriented approaches significantly more often than did parents of 24-month olds, $F(1, 43) = 4.86, p = .033$; conversely, parents of 24-month olds used abstract need-oriented approaches more often than did parents of 18-month olds, $F(1, 43) = 3.98, p = .052$. Correspondingly, parents of 18-month olds used concrete action-oriented strategies more often than abstract need-oriented strategies, $F(1, 17) = 19.88, p < .001$, whereas parents of 24-month olds used the two approaches at the same rate, $F(1, 25) = 2.23, p = .15$.

Univariate ANCOVAs with age as a between-subjects factor were also conducted on rates of attention-eliciting behavior and social approval, controlling for willing engagement (see Table 1 for means). Parents used attention-eliciting behaviors nearly twice as often with 18-month olds as they did with 24-month olds, $F(1,43) = 13.51, p = .001$, but used social approval less often with 18-month olds than they did with 24-month olds, $F(1,43) = 3.99, p = .05$. It should nevertheless be noted that parents physically or verbally praised and indicated approval of children's helping or attempted helping at relatively high rates, at least half as often as they directly encouraged helping via requests for action or via emotion-oriented appeals for help.

The rate of concrete action-oriented approaches was marginally negatively correlated with the rate of abstract need-oriented approaches ($r = -.27, p = .07$). With age and willing engagement controlled, they were no longer significantly related (partial $r = -.19, p = .21$), indicating that their association was driven by age-related differences in parents' use of each one. Rates of attention-eliciting behavior were significantly correlated with rates of concrete action-oriented approaches ($r = .64, p < .001$); these remained related once age and willing engagement were controlled (partial $r = .61, p < .001$). Rates of social approval were uncorrelated with rates of either socialization approach (r 's = .01 and .10, ns).

4 Discussion

As evidence mounts that a wide range of prosocial behavior first becomes evident in the second year of life, interest in its developmental origins has increased. Recent accounts have often emphasized the phylogenetic roots of prosocial behavior and unlearned or innate structures as foundational (e.g., Davidov, Zahn-Waxler, Roth-Hanania, & Knafo, 2013; Hamlin & Wynn, 2011; Warneken & Tomasello, 2009b). As a complement to these, we have focused on potential ontogenetic processes in the young child's socialization experiences, in keeping with theoretical perspectives that emphasize the social and affiliative roots of prosocial behavior and acquisition of culturally valued behavior through children's active participation with more skilled others in everyday activities (Brownell, 2013; Carpendale et al., 2014; Paulus, 2014; Rogoff, Mistry, Goncu, & Mosier, 1993; Nelson, 2010; Vygotsky, 1978). Rheingold (1982) described toddlers' participation with adults in everyday chores around the house as "nascent prosocial behavior." We aimed to

provide a fuller analysis of what parents do to promote early helping in the context of such joint activity, and how their strategies change over the second year, thereby advancing our understanding of socialization processes in the origins of human prosociality.

We found evidence that parents use a variety of strategies and approaches to encourage helping behavior in the second year of life, and that the patterns of use differ with 18 and 24 month olds. With 18-month-olds parents emphasize the concrete aspects of the immediate task and make requests for instrumental, goal-directed behavior, which communicates what, specifically, the child can undertake to participate in the task and help the parent accomplish it. Parents do this through commands and requests for individual action and sometimes through implementing specific, goal-directed actions together with the child. By the end of the second year, parents have decreased their use of such concrete, task-specific approaches and have increased use of abstract approaches that emphasize their own needs or emotions and the child's role as a helper in meeting or alleviating the parent's need, using the two approaches equally often with 24-month-olds. We would expect the more need- and emotion-oriented approach to continue to increase through the preschool period as it communicates the 'why' of helping more than the 'how', thus scaffolding children's understanding, and perhaps also their general motivation for prosocial responding. We also found that parents assist their toddlers, especially one-year-olds, in paying attention to the relevant parts of the helping context; and they routinely respond to toddlers' helping and attempted helping with both physical and verbal forms of social approval.

To our knowledge, this is the first controlled laboratory study of parents' socialization of early-appearing helping behavior since Rheingold's (1982) classic description of toddlers' participation with parents in household-like tasks in the lab. In line with theoretical approaches that emphasize the social origins of prosocial behavior (Paulus, 2014), our results show how parents structure affiliative activity with their young children to elicit simple forms of prosocial responding by directing, prompting, supporting, and encouraging their young toddlers' cooperative engagement in joint actions toward a common end. What parents emphasize changes over the second year as they tune their socialization approaches to children's developing motivation, understanding, and ability to behave prosocially. These results can serve as a bridge between those from more unstructured, naturalistic studies (e.g., Dahl et al., in press; Eisenberg, et al., 1992; Hammond, 2011; Rheingold, 1982) and experimental studies with more structured tasks (e.g., Dunfield, 2011; Svetlova, et al., 2010; Warneken and Tomasello, 2008, 2013), providing opportunities to observe the naturally occurring strategies parents use to support their young children's participation in prosocial tasks, while at the same time controlling and standardizing the setting in which children's prosocial behavior is scaffolded.

4.1 Early Socialization of Prosocial Behavior

Although there is a substantial body of work on socialization of prosocial behavior in older children (see Hastings, Utendale, & Sullivan, 2007; Padilla-Walker, 2014, for reviews), there is relatively little research addressed to socialization of very early prosociality, and few studies that focus on age differences in early socialization practices. A small body of empirical work on associations between parenting style and early-emerging empathic

responding has generally shown that warm, sensitive, responsive parents have toddlers who are more likely to exhibit empathic concern when someone else is distressed (e.g. Moreno, Klute & Robinson, 2008; Robinson, Zahn-Waxler, & Emde, 1994; Spinrad & Stifter, 2006; VanderMark, vanIJzendoorn & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2002). In the current study, in contrast, we were interested in the process of socialization, that is, the specific means by which parents elicit and support children's earliest prosocial responses.

We examined early socialization of prosociality in the context of a household activity in which children participated with their parents. We focused on this context based on the view that young children wish to participate with their parents in cooperative activity and find the joint activity itself rewarding (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Carpendale, et al, 2014; Marcus, 2014; Rheingold, 1982, 1987) along with both theory and empirical research showing that children's participation in household activities grounds the development of autonomous prosociality (Goodnow, 1988; Grusec, et al, 1996). A simple household chore, in this case laundry hanging, afforded various levels of prosociality from specific, parent-directed behaviors to fully autonomous prosocial initiations by the children. Although one might argue that parent-directed or requested behaviors are not necessarily undertaken on the other's behalf and may be more compliance-based than prosocial in spirit, they are nonetheless undertaken cooperatively and are de facto helpful. Such prosociality-by-request takes on particular meaning as the parent and child share and accomplish identifiable goals together, goals that are not initially the child's own. As such meaning accumulates over time and contexts, parent-child joint activity supports increasing other-orientation, autonomy, and spontaneity in the child's prosocial responding (Brownell, 2011; Carpendale & Lewis, 2004; Nelson, 2010). Parents are therefore not simply teaching their children to be prosocial. Rather, they build on children's earliest affiliative motives by embedding children in shared activities with possibilities and expectations for prosocial behavior; expectations and experiences that children internalize over time.

The findings from the current study thus extend the existing research on parenting style in relation to empathy and prosocial responding to provide a picture of the specific behaviors parents use to encourage their children to behave prosocially. A focus on specific socialization practices also permitted us to examine more directly how parents adjust their strategies with children's age in this early formative period. Darling & Steinberg (1993) distinguished between parenting styles and practices, where parenting style reflects the general emotional climate of the parent-child relationship whereas parenting practices encompass situational behaviors with particular socialization goals. We have built on this important distinction, examining parents' practices with respect to the earliest instances of children's prosocial behavior, which can serve as a springboard for additional research to elucidate how such practices may actually give rise to prosocial behavior.

4.2 Age Differences in Socialization of Early Helping

We did not observe age-related differences in the extent to which parents tried to get their toddlers to help; rather, we saw differences in how parents went about it. Because we asked parents to get their children to participate, we cannot draw general conclusions about the overall rates of parent encouragement. It is the age-related differences in how parents

encouraged their toddlers to help that are more informative. With 18-month olds parents mostly told the children directly what to do with commands or requests such as “now get Mommy the cloth.” These are perhaps the simplest and most direct means of communicating both the concrete need for help and specifically how to provide it. Concrete directives do not require the child to understand others’ emotions, be able to figure out any of the necessary steps to initiate helping, or have internalized expectations for prosocial behavior. Instead the child needs only to be guided by a parental request to help successfully. This permits children to engage in helpful behavior before they may fully understand the concept of helping, either the underlying need for it or how to provide it, or of themselves as helpers. With 24-month olds, parents less frequently told their children what to do, and instead increased their use of strategies that motivated children’s helping with descriptions of their own emotional state and the general need for the child’s help, such as “This is a lot of work – I really need your help.” Or they emphasized the child’s role as a helper (“Can you be my helper?”), expecting their older toddlers to understand the more abstract nature of helpfulness and granting the child some degree of autonomy in deciding how to provide it. Thus, parents became less directive and concrete over the second year, reducing their control over the child’s immediate actions and encouraging more autonomous prosocial responses. At the same time they increased their appeal to more abstract need states, communicating the emotional foundations of prosociality while assisting children to understand and act on others’ emotions and needs rather than (or in addition to) others’ goal-related actions.

The finding that parents increasingly emphasized abstract need-oriented communications about prosocial behavior over this age period parallels previous research showing that children’s emotion-based helping increases between 18 and 30 months of age relative to their instrumental or action-based helping (Svetlova, et al., 2010). Children’s use of emotion-descriptive language also increases in this period (Ridgeway et al., 1985), as does parents’ conversational use of internal state words (Beeghly et al., 1986). Further, parents who more often ask their toddlers to talk about emotions have children who are more concerned about others’ distress and who help and share more often and more quickly (Brownell et al., 2013; Garner, 2008). Thus, both in children’s prosocial helping and in parents’ socialization of prosocial helping, we see a transition over the second year from instrumental, action-oriented responding to more empathic, need-oriented responding.

This shift in parents’ socialization strategies may both reflect and contribute to growth in the child’s capacity to help in more sophisticated and complex ways over the opening years of life, a possibility for future research to address. A key feature of socialization is the parent’s transfer of responsibility for culturally appropriate behavior to the child as the child becomes increasingly capable. This process permits the gradual development of skill and knowledge en route to autonomous functioning (Rogoff, et al, 1993; Vygotsky, 1998). Consistent with this perspective, other research has shown that with age, children need fewer prompts from the recipient that helping is needed and about how they can provide help, and that proactive autonomous helping without any prompting increases over this same period (Brownell, et al., 2009; Svetlova, et al, 2010; Warneken, 2013). Here we have shown that as toddlers’ understanding of and ability to produce prosocial behavior differentiates, parents’ socialization strategies also become more differentiated, progressing from directing early helping behavior explicitly to encouraging it more subtly. By reducing the specificity of

their communications about helping over the second year, parents may be helping their toddlers become autonomous helpers in their own right.

We also found that parents praised and socially approved their toddlers' prosocial responding, consistent with recent naturalistic research showing that parents frequently use praise to encourage prosocial behavior in toddlers (Dahl et al., in press), and that they use greater amounts of social approval with older, more socially skilled toddlers. With older children (4 and 7 years of age), mothers also report frequently praising, acknowledging, approving, and thanking their children for various forms of prosocial behavior, including helping (Grusec, 1991). Although material reinforcements may undermine early prosocial behavior (Warneken & Tomasello, 2008), other findings suggest that non-material rewards such as praise may serve a more positive function in early prosocial behavior (e.g., Eisenberg, et al., 1992; Warneken & Tomasello, 2013). Moreover, the function of praise and social approval may differ at different ages, for different types and levels of competence, and for different kinds of children (e.g., Brummelman, Thomaes, de Castro, et al., 2013; Gunderson, Gripshover, Romero, et al., 2013). One question for future research is when and how different types of social approval influence the early development of prosocial behavior.

4.3 Limitations and Conclusions

Although the current study has provided new insights into how parents socialize very early prosocial behavior, several limitations point to the need for additional research. First, parents were asked to get their children to participate in the chore with them. This may have produced more intense or focused efforts by parents than might otherwise have occurred. However, a majority of parents of toddlers report that they engage their children regularly in household chores and routines at home (Hammond & Carpendale, 2013); and a recent naturalistic study found that parents do indeed frequently request helping behavior at home from their 14 – 24 month old toddlers (Dahl et al, in press). Rheingold (1982) also found that parents often elicited and instructed their children's helping in the lab even though they had been asked to refrain from directing the children. Thus, we believe that the age-related patterns in parents' behavior discovered in the everyday task used here are likely to reflect more general, naturally occurring differences. Additional research that compares spontaneous socialization efforts in the laboratory versus the home could nevertheless shed additional light on how much parents scaffold early prosocial behavior. Further comparisons with socialization of other socially desirable behavior would also be instructive, especially to discern whether the age-related patterns found in the current study are specific to prosocial behavior or are more general. Cross-cultural studies could elucidate other strategies that parents use to engage their children in prosocial behavior, which may differ from those in a middle class American sample, particularly in cultures where children are being socialized to take on functional roles such as caring for younger siblings or assisting with food preparation (Whiting & Whiting, 1975).

Second, we cannot draw conclusions from a correlational, cross-sectional design about direction of effects, including whether parents' behavior is driving the growth of children's prosocial behavior, or whether it is a response to increasing competence. Longitudinal

research over the second year is therefore necessary; ideally, this would include experimental manipulation of parent behavior.

Finally, we do not mean to suggest that parental socialization is the only factor supporting the emergence of prosocial behavior. Clearly, the child's own contributions must be part of a full account, including the rapid growth of social and emotional understanding in this age period; increasing control over attention and emotion, and increasing planfulness in generating behavior; the beginning recognition of and adherence to parental expectations and standards for behavior; and child-specific propensities, whether general openness to socialization and instruction, or specific predispositions to empathy, affiliation and prosociality. Moreover, these various influences are likely to assemble differently as a function of other factors such as culture, child temperament, and parent personality. Although the specifics of how these elements intersect and influence one another in early development to create little helpers remains a mystery, the current findings highlight the strategies that parents believe are useful in socializing prosociality. Because prosocial behavior is a normative and socially valued behavior, as well as critical to later growth of social competence, it stands to reason that parents would be invested in socializing it early. Young children are routinely involved by their parents in everyday helping situations and, as the current research shows, such affiliative contexts can also serve as an important opportunity for scaffolding prosociality starting in the second year of life. As Bruner (1990, p. 20) noted, socialization is not simply an 'overlay' on human nature, but rather constitutes an integral part of the system within which development occurs.

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Highlights

- We examine differences in parental strategies for encouraging helping in toddlers.
- Parents of 18-month-olds emphasized concrete, action-oriented task-based approaches.
- Parents of 24-month-olds used more abstract, need-oriented approaches.
- Parents regulated the attention of younger toddlers more.
- Parents offered more social approval to older toddlers.

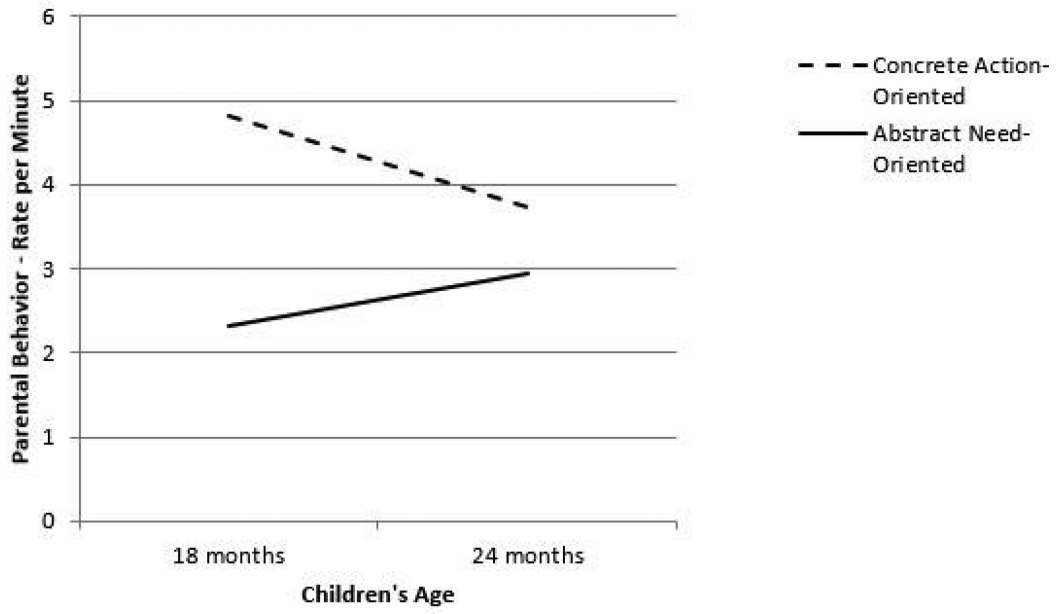


Figure 1. Rates of parents' concrete action-oriented and abstract need-oriented socialization approaches as a function of children's age

Table 1

Rates of Parental Socialization of Prosocial Behavior (Means, SDs) as a Function of Age

	18 Months	24 Months	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Concrete Action-Oriented Approaches	4.81 (1.61)	3.72 (1.99)	4.86	.03
Abstract Need-Oriented Approaches	2.32 (1.52)	2.95 (1.46)	3.98	.05
Total	7.13 (1.95)	6.67 (2.19)	.56	.46
Attention-eliciting	5.09 (2.03)	2.60 (2.01)	13.51	.001
Social approval	1.59 (1.34)	1.78 (1.16)	4.67	.04

Note: Children's willing engagement was controlled in all analyses

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