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## Introduction to the Special Issue: Parental Socialization of Emotion and Self-Regulation: Understanding Processes and Application

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### Abstract

Over 20 years ago, Eisenberg and colleagues (1998a, 1998b) published a landmark article focusing on the socialization of children's emotion and self-regulation, including emotion regulation. In this Special Issue, our goal was to compile current evidence delineating the impact of emotion-related socialization behaviors (ERSBs) on children's emotion, self-regulation, and developmental outcomes. The work in this issue highlights the processes involved in predicting both parents' ERSBs as well as children's developmental outcomes. Researchers have moved beyond testing individual "pieces" of the socialization of emotion model, and now use innovative and sophisticated methods for testing larger models, allowing for more causal interpretations. Special issue contributors focused on longitudinal studies including ERSBs, reviews of the literature extending the original model, and the effectiveness of interventions designed to improve the emotional lives of children and their families. We focus on some of the major themes of the special issue and conclude with recommendations for policies and programs to promote youths' effective emotion-related outcomes.

### Keywords

Socialization; self-regulation; emotion

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It has been just over 20 years since the publication of Eisenberg, Cumberland, and Spinrad's (1998) paper (and commentary, Eisenberg, Spinrad, & Cumberland, 1998) focusing on research on the socialization of emotion. As part of this landmark work, Eisenberg and colleagues developed a model in which characteristics of the child, parent, culture, and context predicted emotion-related socialization behaviors (ERSBs; such as reactions to children's emotions, discussion of emotion, and socializers' emotional expressiveness). In turn, ERSBs were theorized to set the stage for children's social behavior and social competence through their impact on children's arousal and other outcomes (e.g., expression of emotion, understanding of emotion, self-regulation, working models of relationships). The model also considered ways in which factors such as the quality of the parent-child relationship, children's temperament, and parenting style could moderate the relation between ERSBs and children's outcomes. The publication has had a clear impact on the field, having been cited over 2,000 times since its publication (as reported by Google Scholar, 12/2019).

In this Special Issue, our goal was to highlight evidence supporting and expanding the original model. Importantly, over the past 20 years, researchers are beginning to move beyond a focus on the “parts” of the model, and are considering larger and more complex models, indicating that “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.” Together, the manuscripts in this issue indicate that multiple forms and methods of assessing ERSBs and children’s emotionality/regulation should be examined, that prediction is often longitudinal (and in some cases, even after controlling for stability of the constructs), and that the role of ERSBs is evident across diverse samples. It has also become clear that researchers are beginning to take what we know about ERSBs and children’s outcomes by applying this knowledge to intervention programs. Table 1 includes a summary of the 20 articles in the Special Issue, considering the ERSBs examined, methods and samples used, the socialization agents and outcomes.

Across the collection of papers, several major themes emerged focusing on: mothers and other major socializers (i.e., fathers, peers, teachers), innovative and multiple methods and samples, and intervention approaches. In this paper, we briefly discuss how the contributions in this special issue fit with each of these themes. Then, we make some overall recommendations to apply the work in this special issue to the real world of parents and individuals working with children and families.

## **Mothers and Other Major Socializers**

Many of the authors considered both mothers and fathers as socializing agents of children’s emotions and emotion regulation or considered socializers outside of the family. In some investigations, the researchers tested whether the processes of socialization of children’s emotions/regulation were similar for mothers and fathers. For the most part, results generally showed similar patterns of relations for mothers and fathers (Boldt, Goffin, & Kochanska, 2020; Di Giunta et al., 2020; Godleski, Eiden, Shisler, & Livingston, 2020; Lunkenheimer, Hamby, Lobo, Cole, & Olson., 2020; Neppl, Jeon, Diggs, & Donnellan, 2020), although some differences emerged (see Boldt et al., 2020; Di Giunta et al., 2020; Godleski et al., 2020). Still, more work needs to be done on the role of nonparental socializers such as peers, siblings, and other caregivers on children’s emotions and regulation (Cui et al., 2020; Valiente, Swanson, DeLay, Fraser, & Parker, 2020), but preliminary evidence for the importance of other socializers is evident in several papers in the special issue.

## **Innovative and Diverse Methods and Samples**

The papers included in the special issue highlight the diversity of methods and samples for understanding the socialization of children’s emotions. For example, there were state-of-the-art methodologies for understanding youths’ emotionality and emotion regulation (Cui et al., 2020; Loughed, Brinberg, Ram, & Hollenstein, 2020; Lunkenheimer et al., 2020; Perry, Dollar, Calkins, Keane, & Shanahan, 2020; Zhang, Gatzke-Kopp, Fosco, & Bierman, 2020), including neural substrates of children’s emotionality and regulation (Chen, McCormick, Ravindran, McElwain, & Telzer, 2020; Tan, Oppenheimer, Ladouceur, Butterfield, & Silk, 2020). The research presented in the issue often used diverse samples, and many of the samples were considered “at risk” (see Table 1). Despite a great deal of focus on children or

parents who are likely to demonstrate deficits in parenting, regulation, or problem behaviors, we see it as important to, not only reduce these deficits, but to also consider developing families' strengths. That is, in addition to efforts to reduce the *challenges* faced by parents and their children, we should similarly promote families' *strengths and opportunities for growth*.

## Interventions Targeting ERSBs

In addition, multiple studies in this special issue tested intervention programs directly targeting ERSBs using Randomized Control Trials. For example, programs included *Tuning into Teens* (TINT; Kehoe, Havighurst, & Harley, 2020) emotion coaching training (Katz et al., 2020), *After Deployment Adaptive Parenting Tools* (ADAPT; Zhang, Lee et al., 2020) and *Reminiscing and Emotion Training* (RET) program (Speidel- et al., 2020). Clearly, the application of the Eisenberg model to specific interventions is a major contribution of this work, and many families and children have benefited greatly from this extension.

## Big Picture Thoughts: Emotion-Related Socialization Behaviors Matter!

This issue brings together scientific work that is cutting edge and sophisticated. However, as researchers, we are often hesitant to give unequivocal advice to parents and policy makers based on our research. We are careful to stay away from generalizations, given known or unknown moderators or our tendency to study select samples. We argue, however, that we are obligated to translate our scientific work for the public and to make recommendations when there is a clear body of science and decisive evidence. If researchers who do this important work on the socialization of children do not act to bring our research to the public eye, someone else may do so, with an agenda that may or may not have scientific backing (Fabes, 2019; Zigler, 1998)

Given over 20 years of research on the topic since the publication of Eisenberg and colleagues' seminal piece, we argue that we should move beyond a focus on global parenting styles and to a more specific focus on emotion-related socialization behaviors, and in-the-moment parenting practices. Based on the Eisenberg and colleagues' (1998a, 1998b) model, in conjunction with the papers in this Special Issue and related work (Gottman, Katz, & Hooven, 1997; Luthar & Eisenberg, 1997; Morris, Criss, Silk, & Houlberg, 2017), we identify a number of specific strategies that include the expression of emotion, supportive responses to emotion, and appropriate discussion of emotion, and make recommendations for parents and caregivers regarding these strategies.

## Non-supportive Emotion-Related Socialization Behaviors Should be Discouraged: Caregivers should avoid:

- General irritability and strong expressions of anger and hostility;
- Unregulated or excessive negative expressivity, such as anger, sadness/ depression;
- Punishment of children for emotions and feelings;

- Dismissal/minimization or ignoring the expression of emotion;
- Overly upset emotional displays in response to children's distress.

**Positive and Supportive Emotion-Related Parenting Behaviors Should be Encouraged among Parents and other Socialization Agents. Caregivers should:**

- In general, use positive emotional tone and mood during interactions with children and adolescents;
- Validate children's emotions (behaviors may be problematic, but emotions are okay);
- Help children learn strategies for dealing with emotions, by helping children find ways to feel better, providing comfort, or finding ways to solve the problem that led to the distress;
- Discuss emotions, including labeling emotions and acknowledging contexts and causes of emotions.

In addition, parents' own ability to regulate emotions is a key factor in socialization. Thus, efforts to help parents manage their own emotions are important (see Hajal & Paley, 2020; Katz et al., 2020). It is clear that there are many factors that play a role in parents' own regulation, from their own experiences as children (Leerkes et al., 2020), depressive symptoms (Godleski et al., 2020), and parental conflict (Godleski et al., 2020), and these variables could also be targets of intervention and prevention programming (e.g., Speidel et al., 2020). Thus, it is critical that as scientists, we do more to specifically help parents, caregivers, and other socializers learn the best practices to improve children's self-regulation and in turn, their overall emotional lives.

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Table 1.

## Summary of Contributions of the Special Issue

Author	ERSBs examined	ERSBs	Methods	Regulation	Interventions	Sample Characteristics	Agents	Outcomes of ERSBs & Interventions
Boldt et al.	Attachment security	Mother security, father security	-Observed regulation to frustration ages 3, 4, 5 -Survey	N/A	Community sample, mostly White -2, 3, 5 to 5.5 (composite), 10-12years old (longitudinal)	Mothers fathers	-3 timepoints -Regulation 3-5 years -Internalization of adult values, ages 10-12 -Mediation tested through regulation	
Chen et al.	-Emotion expressions -Responses to negative emotions -Emotion talk	Mother ERSB in toddlerhood, observed emotion talk, survey responses to negative emotion, survey expressions	Adolescents (age 13) Amygdala-vmPFC (prefrontal cortex) Functionality to Emotion Faces	N/A	Mostly white 33 months to adolescence (longitudinal)	Mothers	-2 timepoints -Neural responses to emotion faces	
Cui et al.	-responses to emotions (supportive & unsupportive)	-peer & parent survey	-Ecological Momentary Assessment (EMA)	N/A	-diverse sample, all adolescent girls	-mothers -peers	-3 timepoints -T2 Emotion, Regulation Behavior -T3 Internalizing and Prosocial -Mediation tested through emotion and regulation	
Curtis et al.	-parent emotion talk	-observed emotion talk during book reading	-effortful control (survey)	N/A	-1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> generation Chinese American immigrant children -mostly low income -school-age -5 to 9, 7 to 11 (longitudinal)	One parent, mostly mothers (82% T1, 80% T2)	-2 time pts. -T1 emotion talk -T2 EC, sympathy, socially appropriate behaviors, controlled early EC	
Di Giunta et al.	-parent irritability -self efficacy in anger regulation -harsh parenting	-surveys	- adolescent irritability	N/A	-families from 9 different countries 13, 14, and 15 years old (longitudinal)	-mothers -fathers	-3 time pts. -T2 Adolescent Irritability -T2 Harsh Parenting -T3 Externalizing, Internalizing -Mediation tested through adolescent irritability and harsh parenting	
Godleski et al.	Responses to negative emotion (supportive and nonsupportive)	Survey	survey	N/A	Fathers with alcohol problems and nonalcoholic families, -early childhood (composite ages 12-48 months), KG, 4 <sup>th</sup> grade, 8 <sup>th</sup> grade, and 11/12 <sup>th</sup> grade (longitudinal)	Mothers fathers	-5 time points -ERSBs -Child regulation -Aggressive behavioral dysregulation -peer delinquency -Mediation tested from partner conflict outcomes through ERSB	

Author	ERSBs examined	ERSBs	Methods	Regulation	Interventions	Sample Characteristics	Agents	Outcomes of ERSBs & Interventions
Hajjal & Paley	Reviews literature on parents' own regulation and experience of emotion	review	review			N/A	N/A	N/A
Katz et al.	-emotion coaching -emotion validation and dismissing behaviors	-meta-emotion interview -observed emotion validation, dismissing behaviors	-Mother & child regulation (RSA) -Child regulation, surveys (mother reported) -Child observed negativity	Emotion Coaching	-Families exposed to Interparental Violence -Primarily low-income; 6–12 year-old children	-mothers	-assessments pre and post-intervention -changes observed in maternal emotion awareness, emotion responses, competence and child RSA, regulation, negativity, depression	
Kehoe et al.	- responses to emotion (emotion dismissing composite)	-surveys (parent & youth report)	-surveys (parent)	Tuning into Teens	-Australian sample, mostly Caucasian -preadolescent children 10–13 years	-primary caregivers, mostly mothers	-assessments pre and post-intervention -parental emotion awareness, emotion socialization, ER, -youth internalizing	
Leerkes et al.	Sensitivity to distress and responses to toddlers' negative emotion	Direct observation of maternal sensitivity during distress tasks and mother report	N/A	N/A	Diverse community by SES and race -studied mothers only at prenatal interview, infants 6 months & 14 months (longitudinal)		-3 timepoints -Mediation tested via cry processing from mothers' own remembered socialization of emotion to ERSBs -outcome is ERSBs	
Lougheed et al.	-maternal positive and negative expressions of emotions	-grid-sequence analysis of emotion discussion	-positive and negative emotion expression	N/A	-Canadian sample, mostly European Canadian -adolescent females only -13–16 years	-mothers	-real-time observation of emotions and dyadic sequencing - Grid sequence analyses -youth social anxiety	
Lunkenheimer et al.	-parent emotional expressions -parent emotional responsiveness -dyadic positive synchrony	-State Space Grids dyadic positive synchrony (30 second intervals)	-dyadic positive synchrony	N/A	Oversampled for externalizing problems (but not high), community sample -3 and 5 years (longitudinal)	-mothers -fathers	-2 time points -Dyadic positive synchrony -aggressive behaviors	
Neppl et al.	-positive parenting	-observed positive parenting during puzzle task (mood, communication, assertiveness)	-EC survey, mother & father report (averaged)	N/A	-rural families, primarily low or middle income -3, 4, 5, and 6 years old (longitudinal)	-mothers -fathers	-4 time points -Child EC -Child externalizing & school problems -tested mediation of ERSBs through child EC	
Perry et al.	responses to negative emotions	Mother reported	Physiological (RSA, RSA withdrawal) and behavioral measures of	N/A	At risk for future externalizing problems, diverse sample -5 years, 10 years, and 15 years (longitudinal)	mothers	-3 time points -T2 regulation (RSA & behavioral) and emotion -T3 adolescent internalizing	



Author	ERSBs examined	ERSBs	Methods	Regulation	Interventions	Sample Characteristics	Agents	Outcomes of ERSBs & Interventions
				regulation, mother and teacher reports				problems, risk taking, social competence, school problems -mediation tested of ERSBs through regulation and negative emotions
Spetdel et al.	Positive parenting Positive and negative family expressiveness Maternal sensitive guidance during reminiscing	Positive parenting (survey) Family expressiveness (survey) Mothers' reminiscing quality (coded from reminiscing conversations)	Child emotion regulation and lability/negativity (survey)	RET	Maltreated & non-maltreated children, diverse sample –36 to 86 months	mothers	-Assessments pre and 2 post intervention -Maternal sensitive guidance during reminiscing -Child emotion regulation lability/negativity -Mediation tested of maternal sensitive guidance between maltreatment to emotion regulation and lability/negativity	
Tan et al.	Reviews literature in relation to neurological indices of emotion regulation	Review	Review	N/A	N/A	N/A	Considers potential moderators in the relation, such as context, child sex, developmental timing	
Thompson et al.	Responses to negative emotions Positive affective quality	Mothers' responses to negative emotions (survey)	Negative reactivity and executive control (observational battery)	N/A	Community sample, over represented families in poverty and low income –36 to 40 months, 4 times every 9 months (longitudinal)	mothers	-4 time points -T3 emotion knowledge -T4 Child adjustment and social competence -Tested mediation from ERSB to outcomes through emotion knowledge, controlling stability	
Valiente et al.	Reviews literature on teacher, peer, and classroom context as potential socialization of emotion	Review	review	N/A	N/A	teacher	Emotion-Related Interactions and Emotion-related and Academic Student Outcomes	
Zhang, Lee et al.	Responses to negative emotion (supportive/nonsupportive)	-mother and father surveys of reactions to children's emotions	N/A	ADAPT	-military families -children of combat deployed families ages 4–13	-mothers -fathers	Assessments pre and 2 post intervention (1 and 2 year follow ups) -tested improvement ERSB -tested change in internalizing and externalizing	
Zhang, Gatzke-Kopp et al.	-expression of emotion, responses to emotion, discussion of emotion (created supportive composite) -warmth	-observed parenting in structured tasks	-resting RSA -RSA reactivity to anger-inducing film	N/A	-children at-risk for externalizing -majority low income -KG, 1 <sup>st</sup> , and 2 <sup>nd</sup> grade (longitudinal)	-primary caregiver s, 89% mothers	-3 time pts. -Child RSA, RSA withdrawal -Child externalizing -Mediation tested from supportive parenting to externalizing through RSA	

Note: ERSBs=emotion-related socialization behaviors; N/A=not applicable; RSA=respiratory sinus arrhythmia

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