



Warm and harsh parenting as mediators of the relation between maternal and adolescent emotion regulation



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A B S T R A C T

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Maternal hostility/rejection and warmth were considered as potential mediators of the relation between mothers' and adolescents' emotion regulation. Participants were first-year high school students living in Ankara, Turkey and their mothers ($N = 365$). Scales assessing emotion regulation difficulties and maternal hostility/rejection and warmth were administered to both the adolescents and their mothers. Maternal hostility/rejection, but not warmth, mediated the relation between maternal and adolescent emotion regulation. For girls there was, additionally, a direct effect of maternal emotion regulation. The different roles played by parental rejection and parental warmth in the development of adolescents' emotion regulation accord with arguments that socialization occurs in different domains and that rejection and warmth are not aspects of the same domain.

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Considerable research has been directed toward understanding the role of parenting in the development of children's and adolescents' abilities to modulate emotional responses flexibly, so that they are able both to meet their own individual goals as well as to respond to the demands of the situation in which they find themselves. Much of the research has focused on parents' coaching and dismissing behaviors as well as parents' reactions to their children's emotion regulation (ER) or lack thereof (for reviews see [Denham, Bassett, & Wyatt, 2007](#); [Denham et al., 2011](#)). Although most of the research has been conducted with young children there is also a growing body of research on the socialization of ER in adolescents (e.g., see special issue of *Social Development* edited by [Klimes-Dugan & Zeman, 2007](#); [Bariola, Hughes, & Gullone, 2011](#); [Brand & Klimes-Dugan, 2010](#)) as well as on how ER develops over the life span (e.g., [Garnefski & Kraaij, 2006](#); [Gross, 2001](#); [John & Gross, 2004](#)).

In contrast to the work on emotion coaching and responses to emotional behavior, there has been relative neglect of the role of parents' ability to cope with their own emotional arousal and its impact on children's ER abilities ([Katz, Maliken, & Stettler, 2012](#); [Morris, Silk, Steinberg, Myers, & Robinson, 2007](#)). The present study, conducted with adolescents, addressed the relation between mothers' ER and that of their adolescent children. Additionally, it assessed the role of parenting behavior as a mediator between maternal and adolescent ER.

Parent and child and adolescent ER

Children

It has been argued that constant exposure of children to their parents' emotion displays results in those children imitating their parents' way of managing emotions ([Denham, 2007](#); [Morris et al., 2007](#); [Thompson, 1994](#)). And there is evidence to support this

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argument. Silk, Shaw, Skuban, Oland, and Kovacs (2006), for example, found that 4- to 7-year-old children of depressed mothers, particularly daughters, responded to distress by waiting passively (a maladaptive style of ER) rather than actively engaging in distraction (an adaptive style) relative to children of non-depressed mothers. Assuming that depressed mothers have ER problems, it is plausible that a passive stance was adopted by their children as a result of having observed their mothers' own passivity in the face of emotional challenge. Similarly, Newland and Crnic (2011) observed that negative expressiveness by mothers during a laboratory interaction predicted preschoolers' own negative emotions during that same interaction. In a study with somewhat older children, Garber, Braafladt, and Zeman (1991) found that 8- to 13-year-olds and their depressed mothers reported significantly fewer regulation strategies, as well as strategies of poorer quality, than did non-depressed mothers and their children.

Adolescents

Although extra-familial influences such as peers and the media assume greater importance in the socialization process during adolescence, parents continue to be a vital source of support during that period of time. The evidence indicates, in fact, that family interactions are more strongly associated with adolescent depressive symptoms than are interactions with peers (Barrera & Garrison-Jones, 1992; McFarlane, Bellissimo, & Norman, 1995). The form that family interactions take may differ from those that are important in earlier years, however, given changes in the dynamics of parent-child relationships. Unlike preschool children for example, who require more scaffolding and guidance from their parents, adolescents need acceptance along with support for the ability to deal on their own with emotional difficulties (Yap, Allen, & Ladouceur, 2008). Accordingly, mothers' awareness and acceptance of their own emotions, that is, the way they regulate their own emotions, becomes increasingly important as their children grow older: Adolescents require less coaching and need greater emotional and behavioral independence which reduces their receptiveness to methods that work for younger children (Katz & Hunter, 2007; Klimes-Dougan & Zeman, 2007). All this suggests that modeling will continue to be important (possibly increasing in importance) in the development of adolescent ER. Thus Katz and Hunter (2007) found that mothers who were accepting of and expressed their own emotions had adolescents who had lower overall depressive symptoms, as well as higher self-esteem and fewer internalizing and externalizing problems. And Yap, Schwartz, Byrne, Simmons, and Allen (2010) found that adolescents whose mothers were more negative in their behavior during an observed interaction were more likely to display dysregulated behaviors in the interaction as well to report more problems in ER and more symptoms of depression.

In a study of 9- to 19-year-olds, Bariola, Hughes, and Gullone (2012) assessed self-reported ER of mothers and fathers and that of their adolescent children. They found that maternal use of expressive suppression (e.g., "I keep my emotion to myself") predicted children's use of suppression, although their use of cognitive reappraisal (e.g., "When I want to feel less negative emotions, I change the way I'm thinking about the situation") did not. Age was not a moderator of the effect and father ER did not predict adolescent ER. Bariola et al. (2012) suggested that cognitive reappraisal was not linked in mothers and adolescents because this is an internal strategy that can be less easily observed whereas suppression is more easily seen.

In the present study we considered the relation between adolescents' and mothers' self-reports of their ability to regulate negative affect or emotion. As well as looking for a direct relation between mother and adolescent ER we also considered possible mediators of the relation. Specifically, we assessed maternal hostility and rejection as well as maternal warmth as potential mediators between maternal and adolescent ER.

Hostile parenting as a mediator between maternal and adolescent ER

First, with respect to hostility and rejection, we reasoned that emotional dysregulation displayed by mothers could have a negative influence on their parenting behaviors. Dix and Meunier (2009) have reported that depressed parents have fewer child-centered goals, make more negative attributions about their children as well as about their own competence, display more negative affect and less positive affect, and more favorably evaluate coercive parenting behavior. Each of these features in turn can lead to harsh and hostile parent-child interactions which, we argue, lead in turn to problems with children's ER. There is ample evidence, for example, that parents who are hostile and rejecting create problems for their children with respect to ER. Insecurely attached children, for example, have difficulties in expressing negative emotion in appropriate or controlled ways (Cassidy, 1994; Grolnick & Farkas, 2002; Kobak & Sceery, 1988; Morris et al., 2007). High levels of rejection lead to high levels of stress which can adversely affect the development and subsequent functioning of neurobiological systems responsible for the regulation of stress and negative emotion (Gunnar, 2000). Hostile parents also fail to model competent coping behavior in response to stress (Gottman, Katz, & Hooven, 1996). Further, negative and coercive parenting actions increase children's and adolescents' emotional distress and teach them to avoid instead of understanding and appropriately expressing negative emotions (Cummings & Davies, 1996; Eisenberg, Cumberland, & Spinrad, 1998). On the other hand, when parents are available, sensitive, and responsive to the needs of adolescents, the adolescents feel more comfortable with their negative emotions and are able to cope better with difficult situations (Klimes-Dougan & Zeman, 2007). In light of the relevant evidence, then, we predicted that hostile parenting would mediate between maternal and adolescent ER.

Warm parenting as a mediator between maternal and adolescent ER

There is good reason to expect that parental warmth might not parallel the effects of parental rejection in the development of adolescents' ER. Considerable evidence indicates that socialization occurs in different domains and that these domains

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