



Children's negative emotionality moderates influence of parenting styles on preschool classroom adjustment



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ABSTRACT

This investigation utilized a subsample from the Early Head Start Research and Evaluation Project ($N = 1101$) to examine how profiles of maternal behaviors at 36-months were associated with children's classroom aggression and teacher–child relationship quality in pre-kindergarten. Based upon observed behaviors, we identified three distinct profiles of parenting categorized as *sensitive*, *harsh*, and *detached*. Results revealed significant main effects of the *detached* parenting profile on both dimensions of children's classroom functioning in pre-kindergarten. These main effects were not moderated by child sex. The main effects were moderated by child negative emotionality, suggesting a promotive effect of *sensitive* parenting for children with low negative emotionality. Children exposed to *detached* parenting had the poorest teacher–child relationships, regardless of emotionality. These findings demonstrate through use of a person-centered approach how parenting behaviors relate to contextual risks and characteristics, and to children's later relationships with teachers and classmates in pre-kindergarten.

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The positive association between sensitive, responsive maternal parenting behaviors and children's early socioemotional functioning is well documented (Blandon, Calkins, Keane, & O'Brien, 2010; Eisenberg, Cumberland, & Spinrad, 1998; Luster & Okagaki, 2005). In general, parenting that is characterized by supportive, responsive and warm interactional qualities, promotes optimal socioemotional development (see Caspi et al., 2004; Fearon, Bakermans-Kranenburg, van IJzendoorn, Lapsley, & Roisman, 2010; Grusec, 2011; Madigan, Atkinson, Laurin, & Benoit, 2012). This positive parenting may be particularly instrumental for children's wellbeing in socioeconomically disadvantaged populations because the stressors associated with poverty threaten to undermine the development of healthy socioemotional functioning (Demo & Cox, 2000; Whittaker, Harden, See, Meisch, & Westbrook, 2011). However, very few studies have identified the unique profiles of parenting behaviors utilized by mothers from low-income families, or how these profiles of parenting behaviors are linked to children's socioemotional wellbeing in other contexts, such as the pre-kindergarten classroom. Additionally, children's biologically-based characteristics, such as sex and temperament, interact with the parenting environment (Bradley & Corwyn, 2008; Gottlieb, Wahlsten, & Lickliter, 2006; Kiff, Lengua, & Zalewski, 2011; Paulussen-Hoogbeem, Stams, Hermanns,

& Peetsma, 2007) to influence children's socioemotional development (Coplan, Reichel, & Rowan, 2009; Ganiban, Ulbricht, Saudino, Reiss, & Neiderhiser, 2011; Sanson, Hemphill, Yagmurlu, & McClowry, 2011). To address these issues, the present study utilized data from the Early Head Start Research and Evaluation Project (EHSRE) to examine profiles of maternal parenting behaviors at 36-months, children's subsequent socioemotional development in pre-kindergarten, and variations due to child sex and negative emotionality.

The guiding framework for this study is an *ecological and dynamic model of transition* (EDMT; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000), a variation of ecological systems theory (e.g., Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) that conceptualizes the dynamic interplay between the child and his/her multiple ecological contexts, with a focus on the transition to school. Specifically, this model proposes that children are engaged in proximal processes in both family and school contexts (as well as neighborhoods and peers), with relationships in both settings influencing children's success as they transition to formal schooling (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). The combined direct and indirect influences from relationships within these contexts, as well as the stability and change of these influences over time, are critical for children's socioemotional development, and ultimately the transition to formal schooling. Within this framework, we consider how the nature and quality of parenting experiences in the home extend to the types of behaviors and interactions children experience in the preschool context. Moreover, as much as parenting influences children's behaviors and interactions in other settings, so do children's individual, biologically-based traits (i.e., person characteristics). For example, sex (e.g., Chang, Olson, Sameroff, & Sexton, 2011) and temperament (e.g., Lee, Zhou, Eisenberg, & Wang, 2013) influence

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how children respond to the environment, as well as the types of responses they elicit from others, especially parents (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

Person-centered approach to examine parental behaviors

Most research on parenting has focused on variable-centered approaches to parenting, such as identifying scores on different specific dimensions of parenting that vary across individuals (e.g., Crossley & Buckner, 2012; Piko & Balazs, 2012). Person-centered analyses identify groups of individuals with similar patterns across a constellation of parenting behaviors. Evidence from person-centered approaches yields a different view of the nature of parenting behaviors, namely the level (or position on a continuum) and shape (patterns across multiple domains) (McCullough, Harding, Shaffer, Han, & Bright, 2014). Importantly, person-centered analyses do not require an assumption of homogeneity, and in fact assume underlying differences in the distribution of individual characteristics among subgroups. For the purposes of this study, we used person-centered analyses to examine varying dimensions of observed parenting behaviors to determine unique clusters of parenting practices. A person-oriented approach provides a useful tool to identify and interpret distinct patterns that can be replicated across samples and utilized by policymakers and practitioners (NICHD ECCRN, 2004).

Two recent studies drawing data from the EHSRE dataset have demonstrated the utility of person-centered approaches to studying mothers' observed parenting. Cook, Roggman, and D'zatko (2012) identified three parenting profiles at child age 14-, 24- and 36-months with parent, family, and child characteristics that differed between each group. For example, mothers in the developmental parenting group (characterized by sensitive and responsive parenting) had significantly more years of education, fewer indicators of poverty, and fewer children when compared to mothers from other groups. Additionally, Brady-Smith et al. (2013) identified similar patterns of parenting, however they utilized a within-ethnic group approach. Their analyses revealed that although the magnitude of mean scores of each individual parenting behavior differed among European American, African American and Hispanic mothers, the parenting styles were comparable across all ethnic groups, except for the lack of a group characterized by high levels of negative regard among Mexican-American mothers. They also reported similar demographic differences among the groups, as those in the supportive parenting group were less socioeconomically disadvantaged than those in the directive or detached parenting groups. Additionally, they used these patterns to predict child cognitive skills and parent-reported emotion regulation at ages 2 and 3. However, these studies, as well as the vast majority of others that have relied on person-centered approaches to classify parenting behaviors (e.g., McCullough et al., 2014) have yet to consider how these classifications extend to children's socioemotional development in other settings, namely early childhood classrooms. To our knowledge, only two studies (Carpenter & Mendez, 2013; Cook et al., 2012) have examined how parenting styles or profiles derived from person-centered approaches predict children's externalizing behaviors, and only Carpenter and Mendez (2013) utilized teacher-reports. In the present study, we seek to extend this body of work by considering how profiles of parenting behaviors when children are 36-months of age influence two aspects of teacher-reported child socioemotional adjustment in preschool classrooms: Teacher-child relationship quality and child classroom aggression.

Parenting experiences and children's classroom behaviors and interactions

Parenting and teacher-child relationships

A great amount of recent empirical research has examined associations between parent-child and teacher-child relationships with observations of parent-child dyadic behavior (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2007; Pianta, La Paro, Payne, Cox, & Bradley, 2002) and teacher-ratings of

relationship quality (e.g., Hughes & Cavell, 1999). For example, in a sample of socioeconomically disadvantaged 4-year-olds, observed mother-child dyadic interactions during block-design play tasks were significantly correlated with teacher-child relationship quality (Pianta, Nimetz, & Bennett, 1997). Specifically, children observed in positive and intimate mother-child dyads were more likely to be rated by their teachers as having positive teacher-child relationships, characterized by high closeness, low conflict, and low dependency (Pianta et al., 1997). The present study is thus guided by the EDTM in order to help refine our understanding of how early parent-child proximal processes at home carry over to teacher-child relationship quality in preschool by measuring whether parenting practices are associated with teacher-reported child aggression, and testing whether this link is moderated by child sex and negative emotionality.

Parenting and classroom aggression

Parenting behaviors during early childhood influence children's aggressive and dysregulated classroom behaviors (e.g., Stormshak, Bierman, McMahon, & Lengua, 2000). Specifically, children who experience harsh parenting as toddlers exhibit higher levels of aggression and lower levels of emotion regulation in kindergarten and subsequent school years (Callahan, Scaramella, Laird, & Sohr-Preston, 2011; Campbell, Shaw, & Gilliom, 2000; Chazan-Cohen et al., 2009; Del Vecchio & O'Leary, 2006). Further, harsh parenting may indirectly and directly undermine children's self-regulation skills (Scaramella & Leve, 2004). Parents using harsh parenting behaviors often fail to model appropriate ways of regulating their own negative emotions, and may control children's behaviors within interactions (Bates & Pettit, 2007). These parents may also interpret their children's negative emotional reactivity as intentional or controlled, leading to a cycle of coercion in which parents enact harsh parenting and elicit negative emotional reactivity in children who fail to develop appropriate self-regulation strategies (Chang, Schwartz, Dodge, & McBride-Chang, 2003; Scaramella & Leve, 2004).

Parent-reports of harsh parenting behaviors are often associated with increased teacher-reported bullying and aggressive behaviors among young children (Chang et al., 2003). Children who display aggressive behavior in the classroom often have negative relationships with teachers, characterized by high conflict and little closeness (Ladd, Birch, & Buhs, 1999). Aggression has been shown to function in a cycle of dyadic conflict between the teacher and the child; children who display disruptive behavior in the classroom elicit less positive and more negative reactions from teachers, leading to subsequent behavioral difficulties, including less positive school engagement and academic motivation. In addition, escalating aggression may disrupt the development of a positive teacher-child relationship that would otherwise benefit child functioning in the classroom (Keogh, 2003). Overall, students in supportive relationships with teachers show better school adaptive behaviors and academic motivation, which in turn, transfers to teachers' positive perceptions of, and involvement with, the students.

Child characteristics as moderators of socioemotional development

Child sex

Child sex is also an important trait to consider when examining parent-child and teacher-child relationships because previous studies suggest differences in relationship quality for boys and girls in these two contexts (Saft & Pianta, 2001; Stuhlman & Pianta, 2002). One study reported elementary school boys insecurely attached with their mothers to be less liked by their teachers as compared to securely attached boys (Cohn, 1990); however, this particular study did not explicitly measure relationship quality between the teacher and the child. Girls are typically found to exhibit lower aggression in and outside of the classroom compared to boys (e.g., Campbell et al., 2000), as well as closer and less conflictual relationships with teachers during early childhood and early elementary school (Baker, 2006; Griggs, Gagnon,

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