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Emotion socialization and internalizing behavior problems in diverse youth: A bidirectional relationship across childhood

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A B S T R A C T

Mothers' and fathers' emotion socialization (ES) practices have been widely associated with child socioemotional outcomes. To extend this research, we examined the bidirectional relationship between parent ES practices (supportive and non-supportive parenting) and internalizing behavior problems in children of Anglo and Latino parents. Participants were 182 mothers and 162 fathers and their children with or without intellectual disability (ID). We compared the stability of mother and father ES practices across child ages 4–8. We utilized cross-lagged panel modeling to examine the bidirectional relationship between parents' ES and child internalizing behavior problems. Emotion socialization practices differed across time by parent gender, with mothers displaying higher levels of supportive parenting and lower levels of non-supportive parenting than fathers. Cross-lagged panel models revealed differential relationships between child internalizing behaviors and emotion socialization practices by parent gender and by ethnicity. Implications for intervening with culturally diverse families of children with ID are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Childhood is a time in which individuals develop independence in their self-regulation abilities. Children with intellectual disability (ID) are particularly at risk for deficits in emotion regulation (Nader-Grosbois, 2014; Wilson, 1999), which increases the likelihood of developing psychological disorders (Aldao, Nolen-Hoeksema, & Schweizer, 2010). Children with ID are up to four times as likely as typically developing (TD) children to meet criteria for a psychiatric disorder at any given time (Dekker & Koot, 2003; Einfeld et al., 2011). Depressive and anxiety disorders have been found to be significantly higher in children with ID than in their TD peers (Green, Berkovits, & Baker, 2015; Hammen & Brennan, 2003). Prevalence rates of anxiety disorders range from 10% to 22% in youth with ID compared to rates of 3%–7% in TD youth (Dekker & Koot, 2003; Emerson, 2003). Though there has been a focus on the elevated level of externalizing disorders in children with ID, there is still much to be learned about internalizing disorders in this population. Further, contextual factors also contribute to children's social-emotional outcomes. Parents' reactions to children's emotions have been shown to play an important role in the development of emotion regulation (Eisenberg, Cumberland, & Spinrad, 1998). These processes are likely to differ among families of children with ID and among families of diverse background.

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1.1. Emotion socialization and child outcomes

Parents' reactions to children's emotional displays have been well documented as a form of emotion socialization and have been associated with both child emotion regulation and expression (Eisenberg et al., 1998; Kopp, 1989). Fabes and colleagues (2003) classified parents' reactions to children's negative emotions as supportive or non-supportive. Supportive reactions include: emotion-focused reactions, problem-focused reactions, and expressive encouragement, while non-supportive include: punitive reactions, minimization reactions, and distress reactions. Non-supportive parental reactions have been shown to be associated with children displaying more inhibition and internalizing problems (Denham, Bassett, & Wyatt, 2007; Hastings & De, 2008), while supportive parental reactions have been associated with adaptive emotion regulation skills and greater social competence in children (Eisenberg et al., 1998; Gottman, 1997). Prior literature has examined the effect of emotion socialization on child outcomes; however, there is a need to examine the bidirectional relationship between emotion socialization and child behavior longitudinally.

1.2. Emotion socialization in children with intellectual disability

There is still much to be learned about how emotion socialization processes work for children with intellectual disability (ID). Mothers of children at developmental risk appear to show increased negative affect, while their children show elevated externalizing emotional expression (Newland & Crnic, 2011). Paczkowski and Baker (2007) found that children with ID expressed higher levels of overall problem behaviors when compared to their TD peers, particularly when their mothers displayed higher levels of non-supportive parenting.

Examination of emotion socialization and parenting of children with ID has often focused on mothering, though research in TD children has indicated that both fathers and mothers contribute to a child's social-emotional and cognitive functioning (Schacht, Cummings, & Davies, 2009). Research has suggested that fathers are comparable to mothers in their emotional availability and sensitivity when parenting their children with ID (de Falco, Venuti, Esposito, & Bornstein, 2009). However, differences have been noted between mothers and fathers of children with ID in regard to parent-child interactions. Mother negative-controlling behavior has been associated with subsequent increases in children's difficult behaviors; while for fathers, children's initial level of difficult behavior predicted change in father's negative-controlling behavior (Fenning, Baker, Baker, & Crnic, 2014). Further, one study found that both mothers and fathers of young children with ID were significantly more non-supportive than parents of TD children (Rodas, Zeedyk, & Baker, in press). This study also found that children of depressed fathers in particular were especially vulnerable to developing internalizing behavior problems in an unsupportive parenting context. Green & Baker (2011) found that mothers displayed higher levels of negative affect when compared to fathers. Additionally, mother positive affect predicted increased social skills for TD children but not for children with ID, while father positive affect predicted lower social skills. Lastly, this study found that both mother and father negative affect predicted lower social skills for children with ID.

1.3. Latino and anglo parenting

In addition to potential differences between mother and father parenting practices, culture is an important variable that may affect parenting practices and emotional socialization in youth with or without ID. Studies suggest that Latino parents—primarily of Latin American origin—have differing parenting beliefs from Anglo parents. These differing beliefs include placing more importance on "*familismo*" (familism or a focus on family), on "*respeto*" (respect), and being "*bien educado*" (well-mannered) (Calzada, Fernandez, & Cortes, 2010; Harwood, Leyendecker, Carlson, Asencio, & Miller, 2002). These differing parenting beliefs are likely to influence emotion socialization practices in Latino parents. The bulk of the research on emotion socialization in Latino families has focused on emotion expression. Studies have shown Anglo mothers display more warmth than Latina mothers (Ispa et al., 2004). Notably, one study found that Anglo and Latina mothers used similar emotion socialization practices, though Latina mothers were more likely to utilize minimization responses to their children's negative affect (Lugo-Candelas, Harvey, & Breaux, 2015).

Researchers are beginning to examine Latino mother and father similarities and differences in their emotion socialization. Gamble, Ramaku, and Diaz (2007) found that Mexican-American mothers and fathers did not differ in their report of emotion socialization strategies, though there were differences in their observed supportiveness. Mothers were consistently more supportive and responsive than fathers. This is interesting given that prior research has found differences among mother and father report of emotion socialization in European American families, such that fathers report being more minimizing and less supportive than mothers (Eisenberg et al., 1998).

1.4. Parenting differences by ethnic group and delay status

The research on ethnicity and parenting in children with ID is growing. Researchers have found that, compared with Anglo mothers, Latina mothers of children with ID place less responsibility on their children for their behavior problems (Chavira, Lopez, Blacher, & Shapiro, 2000), and value independence in their child less (Rueda, Monzo, Shapiro, Gomez, & Blacher, 2005). Latina mothers also have reported that their child with ID has had a greater positive impact on the family when compared to Anglo mothers (Blacher and Baker, 2007; Blacher et al., 2013). To date there has been little research directly examining