EMOTION REGULATION IN THE FAMILY SYSTEM

Integrating Mother–Child, Father–Child, and Family–Wide Processes

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Emotion Regulation: Implications

- Internalizing & Externalizing Problems (Eisenberg et al., 2001; 2003; 2005)
- Peer relationships (Davidov & Grusec, 2006)
- Empathy and Prosocial Behaviors (Valiente et al., 2004)
- Academic Success (Graziano, et al., 2007; Gumora & Arsenio, 2002)
Emotion Regulation

- What does regulation refer to?
  - The modulation of the experience, duration, and expression of emotion
  - Positive and Negative Affect

- Developmental objectives of ER
  - Control: not excessive maintenance or heightening
  - Expression: not excessive suppression
    (Campos et al., 2004; Cassidy, 1994; Cole et al., 2004; Thompson, 1994)
Key Family Subsystems

Parent-Child Processes
- Warmth & Emotional Support
  (Davidov & Grusec, 2006; Eisenberg et al., 2005, Gottman et al., 1996)

Emotional Climate
- Positivity, Warmth, Cohesion: promotes ER
- Negativity, tension, conflict: undermines ER
  (Eisenberg et al., 2001, 2005, except see 2003)

Interparental (Executive) Subsystem Conflict
- Greater emotional distress & reactivity (Davies & Cummings, 1998)
- Poorer self-soothing and down-regulation (Gottman & Katz, 1997)
Family Systems Theory: Important Next Steps

- **Wholism**
  - Broadens focus beyond dyadic processes

- **Within the Family Context**
  - How do these processes function within the family

- **Interdependency**
  - Shifts focus from subsystem → outcome
  - Interrelations among family dimensions
Wholism

- A complete picture of the family context encompasses more than subsystems
  (Minuchin, 1985)

- **Emotional Climate: Conceptualization**
  - A whole-family construct (Thompson & Meyer, 2007)
  - Unique relations with emotional development
  - A context in which subsystems function
Challenges in the Family Context

We need to understand parenting in context

- Past research with 2-parent families:
  - Often focus on one parent, usually mothers
  - Mothers and Fathers tested separately

We need to account for commonalities across family dimensions

- Past research has identified key dimensions
  - Generally tested separately = out of context
  - Often have overlapping principles
Overlap in Key Family Subsystems

Parent-Child Processes
- **Warmth** (Davidov & Grusec, 2006; Eisenberg et al., 2005)
- **Emotional Support** (Davidov & Grusec, 2006; Gottman et al., 1996)

Emotional Climate
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- Negativity, tension, **conflict**: undermines ER (Eisenberg et al., 2001, except see 2003)

Interparental (Executive) Subsystem **Conflict**

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Interdependency

Subsystems affect and are affected by each other

- Need to explore relations among family dimensions for a more complete picture
- Broaden focus from predictor $\rightarrow$ outcome

How do these processes function together?
Independent Effects Model

Accounting for Interrelations Among Predictors

Family Negativity → Emotion Regulation
Mother Emotional Support → Emotion Regulation
Parental Conflict → Emotion Regulation
Father Emotional Support → Emotion Regulation
Family Positivity → Emotion Regulation

Each Associated With Emotion Regulation
Interparental Indirect Effects Model

Executive Subsystem as Organizing Factor for Family functioning

- Interparental Conflict
- Family Negativity
- Mother Emotional Support
- Father Emotional Support
- Family Positivity
- Emotion Regulation

In Turn, Associated With Emotion Regulation
Family as Context for Parenting

Parenting as a Central Factor for Children’s Emotion Regulation

- Family Negativity
- Interparental Conflict
- Family Positivity
- Mother Emotional Support
- Father Emotional Support

Emotion Regulation
Study Goals

- To test different models that examine relations between interparental, emotional climate, and mother- and father-child dynamics in relation to children’s emotion regulation

- To compare models to determine which provides the best fit with the data
Sample

N = 150 Families
- 2-parent households (85% married)
- Together for a minimum of 2 years

Children:
- 49% girls, median age 10 yrs, Range: 8-12
- Diverse Sample:

  55% Caucasian  
  28% African-American  
  6% Latino/a  

  1% Asian  
  1% Native American  
  7% Biracial  
  3% Other
Observational Tasks

**TRIADIC FAMILY ACTIVITIES**
- Family Game Task
- Family Planning Task
- Post-Conflict Cool Down

**INTERPARENTAL TASK**
- Parental Conflict Discussion
Children’s Emotion Regulation

- Parents: ERC (Shields & Cicchetti, 1997)
  - Expression and Control (average scores summed)
  - Positive and Negative Affect (summed)

- Child: TAS (Spielberger et al., 1983)
  - Ability to regulate anger
Parental Warmth and Emotional Support

- **Parent: PACR Warmth** (Easterbrooks & Goldberg, 1991)
  - Warmth, supportive responding to distress, and respect for child’s emotions

- **Observed: Emotional Supportiveness** (SCIFF; Lindahl & Malik, 2000)
  - Attunement, supportive responding
Interparental Subsystem

Interparental Conflict

- Child: CPIC Conflict Properties (Grych et al., 1992)
- Parent: Verbal and Physical Aggr. (CPS; Kerig, 1996)
- Observed: Marital Communication during Problem Solving Task
Family Emotional Climate

Positive Emotional Climate

- Family Positivity/Cohesion
  - Observed: expressions of positive affect, comfort, satisfaction
  - Observed: “unity, togetherness, and closeness within a family” (SCIFF, Lindahl & Malik, 2000)
  - Parents: Positive expressiveness in the family (SEFQ; Halberstadt et al., 1995)

Negative Emotional Climate

- Family Negativity
  - Observed: expressions of negative affect, hostility, tension (SCIFF, Lindahl & Malik, 2000)
  - Parents: Negative expressiveness in the family (SEFQ; Halberstadt et al., 1995)
RESULTS

• Establish preliminary associations
• Test theoretical models
• Model comparisons
Establishing Links for Each Family Dimension

- Mother Emot. Support → Emotion Regulation: 0.40
- Emotion Regulation → Interparental Conflict: 0.30
- Parenting: Emotion Regulation
- Emotional Climate
- Emotional Climate → Emotion Regulation: 0.42
- Family Negativity → Emotion Regulation: 0.20
- Family Positivity
- Family Positivity → Emotion Regulation: 0.42
Independent Effects Model

- Family Negativity
- Mother Emotional Support
- Parental Conflict
- Father Emotional Support
- Family Positivity

\[ \chi^2(10) = 13.091, \text{ ns} \]
\[ \chi^2/df = 1.309 \]
AGFI = .93

RMSEA = .046
CFI = .99
AIC = 65.091

Emotion Regulation
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Interparental Indirect Effects Model

\[ \chi^2(11) = 13.933, \text{ ns} \]
\[ \chi^2/\text{df} = 1.267 \]
\[ \text{AGFI} = .93 \]
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Family as Context for Parenting

\[ \chi^2(13) = 22.147, \ p < .05 \]
\[ \chi^2/df = 1.704 \]
AGFI = .90
RMSEA = .067
CFI = .97
AIC = 68.147
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\[ \chi^2/df = 1.704 \]
\[ AGFI = .90 \]
\[ RMSEA = .067 \]
\[ CFI = .97 \]
\[ AIC = 68.147 \]
Model Comparisons

χ² Comparisons

- Parallel Mediators > Family as Context
  - \( \chi^2(3) = 9.056, p < .05 \)

- Interparental Indirect > Family as Context
  - \( \chi^2(2) = 7.214, p < .05 \)

- Parallel Mediators or Interparental Indirect
  - \( \chi^2(1) = 0.842, ns \)
**Model Comparisons**

- Akaike Information Criterion (AIC)
- Useful comparison of models with same variables (Kline, 2002)
- Lower values reflect better, more parsimonious fit with the data

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<th>Independent Predictors</th>
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And the best fitting model was...

Interparental Conflict

- Family Negativity
- Mother Emotional Support
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Emotion Regulation
Discussion

- Incorporated Multiple Dimensions of Family Functioning:
  - mothers and fathers parenting practices
  - family emotional climate
  - Interparental functioning

- Multi-informant, multi-method design
- Model comparison approach
Different Roles for Family Dimensions

Parent that facilitates ER:
- Warmth & Emotional Attunement, sensitivity, and responsiveness
- Mother-Child: Robust and Direct Predictor

Family Positivity and Cohesion linked with adaptive ER, in the context of parenting

Interparental Subsystem: Executive Role in Family
Clinical Implications

- Family systems theory: guiding framework for family assessment

- Multiple Direct Influences:
  - Parent-Child Interactions
  - Emotional Climate, especially positivity/cohesion

- Interparental (Executive) Functioning may be an avenue that may help facilitate change in parenting and emotional climate
Future Directions

- Longitudinal Replication
- Unpacking Father-Child link: moderated by levels of involvement?
- Broader measures of ER
- Broader assessment of family
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