

## CHAPTER

# 2

# The Emotionate Child

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How should we understand child development? What is the child like? As long as people have written about young children, emotions have been prominent in their descriptions. Jean Jacques Rousseau described childhood in *Emile* as a time “when laughter was ever on the lips, and when the heart was ever at peace” (2008/1792, p. 63), setting the stage for Victorian and post-Victorian sentimentality concerning children. Freud characterized the id-dominated young child as being utterly consumed by irrational emotionality and the relentless pursuit of gratification until the ego develops. Proponents of the child study movement at the turn of the 20th century were concerned with the growth of moral emotions and emotional self-control as part of character development. The origins of children’s emotional adjustment occupied the attention of developmental thinkers at mid-century after the cataclysm of world war. Emotion—often carefree, irrational, disorganizing, or disturbing—has long characterized public perceptions of the nature of the child, with emotional self-control a mark of growing maturity.

In contemporary thinking, however, a very different portrayal of the child has emerged. The “scientist in the crib” is a powerful metaphor for the remarkable cognitive abilities of the young child that have captured scientific and popular attention (see, e.g., Gopnik, Meltzoff, & Kuhl, 2000). Developmental scientists have discovered that young children

are, from a surprisingly early age, astute observers and interpreters of the social and nonsocial world. In an era when brain development and a national concern with school readiness have shaped public discourse about childhood, scientific discoveries of early-emerging conceptual skills have focused attention on early learning and cognitive achievement. These discoveries have contributed to a current portrayal of the rational, intuitively insightful young thinker.

Yet the emotional character of the child endures in contemporary studies showing that emotionality is at the heart of early social competence, self-understanding, the growth of conscience, and moral awareness. Emotion is motivationally important to the development of cognitive competence and academic achievement, undermining the traditional distinction between the rational mind and irrational emotion. What is also new about contemporary understanding is an appreciation of the constructive influences of emotion as they are shaped by early relational experience. Whereas emotion in traditional views reflected the primitive, irrational, or egocentric character of immaturity, emotion in contemporary portrayals is seen as an essential contributor to behavioral competence as it is incorporated into and shaped by early relationships. In a sense, the "scientist in the crib" is also an affective and relational explorer, for whom cognition teamed with emotion contributes to developing capability. Attachment theory has made seminal contributions to this contemporary view of the emotionate child, especially in the work of the Minnesota Parent-Child Longitudinal Study (MPCLS) that this volume honors.

This chapter profiles contemporary work on the influence of emotion on developing competence and the significance of early relationships for its influence. In the section that follows, we consider the meaning of the "emotionate child" and the characteristics that distinguish this portrayal of childhood development from others. In the next section, research that has led to this characterization of children is summarized to illustrate the constructive functions of emotion in developing competence and the significance of relationships for this constructive influence. The growth of the emotionate child is considered next, with special emphasis on the development of emotion and emotion regulation through close relationships. In a concluding section, we consider why this matters and

how an understanding of the emotionate quality of children has new implications for our thinking about early development.

## THE EMOTIONATE CHILD

What do we mean when we describe the child as “emotionate”? The following definition provides a beginning:

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**Emotionate** (i-mō-sh(ə)-nət):

1. characterized by emotional apperception, sensitivity, and/or insight  
(*her sympathetic response showed that she was an emotionate child*)
  2. marked by special bearing upon, reference to, or involvement with  
emotional understanding (*an emotionate side to his nature*)
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Describing the developing child as “emotionate” describes a child in which emotion is a prominent organizer of behavior and competence. In much the same way that describing someone as “rational” highlights the influence of reason, the term “emotionate” highlights the constructive influences of another internal process—emotion—on action and thought. “Emotionate” carries much different connotational meaning than describing the child as “emotional,” which traditionally connotes impulsivity, unthinking, or lack of sophistication. The emotionate child is not a throwback to the thinking of Rousseau, Freud, and their followers. It reflects a new view of the importance of emotion in the development of behavioral competence.

This emergent portrayal of the emotionate child derives from four important conclusions from contemporary research on early development:

First, *Emotional skills predict behavioral competence in multiple developmental domains*. Emotional competence contributes to seminal achievements in early development. In longitudinal analysis, for example, Denham and her colleagues showed that an emotional competence composite (consisting of children’s emotion knowledge and emotion regulation skills) at ages 3 to 4 predicted children’s social competence in kindergarten (Denham, Blair, Schmidt, & DeMulder, 2002; see also

Denham et al., 2003). The security of attachment also directly predicted later social competence, but its influence was partially mediated by differences in emotional competence. Izard and his colleagues, in a longitudinal study of at-risk young children, reported that differences in emotion knowledge at age 5 predicted positive and negative social behavior and academic competence four years later, controlling for the influence of verbal ability (Izard et al., 2001; see also Trentacosta & Izard, 2007). As discussed later, emotional competence is also associated with conscience development, self-concept, and multiple features of early social cognition. Emotion is predictive of these developmental achievements because of how emotion contributes to the organization of social skills and dispositions, motivation in social and academic settings, and self-awareness.

Second, *Emotion is an entrée into others' internal experience. It also contributes to emergent self-understanding.* Emotion is one of the earliest windows into another's internal experience to develop. Before the first birthday, infants are already aware of the affective meaning of others' emotional expressions and the "aboutness" of these expressions (i.e., their referential quality), which leads to their use in social referencing (Moses, Baldwin, Rosicky, & Tidball, 2001; Thompson & Lagattuta, 2006). Emotion understanding in the second year is a foundation for understanding others' intentions, desires, and goals, and thus contributes to developing theory of mind. Emotions and their causes are prominent in young children's talk about others' internal states, and they are the basis for children's judgments of motives for good or bad behavior (Bartsch & Wellman, 1995; Wright & Bartsch, 2008). Emotions are an early gateway into understanding other mental states in people.

Emotions are also prominent in children's earliest internal self-descriptions, particularly as emotion language is linked to expressions of needs, desires, and concerns (Bretherton, Fritz, Zahn-Waxler, & Ridgeway, 1986). The emergence of self-conscious evaluative emotions (such as pride, shame, and guilt) during the second year further connects emotion with self-understanding (Lagattuta & Thompson, 2007). As discussed later, young children's earliest self-representations are strongly emotional in quality, suggesting that children perceive themselves in large

measure by how they respond emotionally to events. Emotion is uniquely influential in the development of social understanding and self-awareness because of the salience of emotions and their centrality to other mental and motivational states. Emotions also constitute an early conceptual bridge between the child's personal experience and the experience of other people.

Third, *Emotion is organized and regulated by relational experience*. As Sroufe (1996) has noted, "[T]he general course of emotional development may be described as movement from *dyadic regulation to self-regulation of emotion*" (p. 151; italics in original). The importance of early relationships to emotion regulation can be observed most clearly in stress management. In a study of the responses of 18-month-olds to moderate stressors, for example, Nachmias, Gunnar, Mangelsdorf, Parritz, and Buss (1996) reported that postsession cortisol elevations were found only for temperamentally inhibited toddlers who were in insecure relationships with their mothers. For inhibited toddlers in secure relationships, the mother's presence helped to buffer the physiological effects of challenging events. In light of what is now known about the plasticity of neurobiological stress circuitry early in development, it is reasonable to conclude that caregiver responsivity contributes to the developing organization of emotion-related reactivity based on recurrent early experiences of stress like this, a conclusion supported by studies of stress reactivity in young children experiencing abuse or neglect (see Gunnar & Vasquez, 2006). Early relational experience is important not only to emotion regulation, but also to the organization of emotional experience and the development of individual emotional dispositions.

Such a conclusion is consistent with attachment theory, which views early secure or insecure relationships as significant for emotional development and emotion regulation (e.g., Cassidy, 1994; Thompson, 1994). Findings from the MPCLS indicate that early mother-child attachment security was associated with greater positive affect in social situations, less petulance and aggression, and greater empathy and socioemotional competence when children were preschoolers, and diminished risk for affective psychopathology at older ages, compared with children with insecure attachment histories (Sroufe, Egeland, Carlson, & Collins, 2005).

As discussed later, better understanding of the influence of secure attachments on emotional development is one of the most important contemporary challenges for attachment research.

Finally, *Emotion is the foundation for early social representations that are the basis for social competence.* Social cognition is emotional in quality. This also begins early, when social expectations in infancy are associated with the positive affectivity of contingent responsiveness and the emotional salience of distress-relief episodes, which also contribute to differential social expectations for mothers and fathers (Lamb & Malkin, 1986; Watson, 2001). Emotions and their regulation are central to differences in attachment security at the end of the first year, reflecting differential representations of parental sensitivity and care. Emotion is encoded into the emergence of desire psychology by which toddlers comprehend differences in goals, desires, and intentions through the emotions associated with their satisfaction or frustration (e.g., Repacholi & Gopnik, 1997). Emotion-related ascriptions are also central to the earliest trait attributions by which young children make judgments about peers as "mean" or "nice" (Giles & Heyman, 2005; Heyman & Gelman, 1999), foreshadowing the emergence of hostile attribution biases. Emotional attributions related to human welfare are foundational to young children's differentiation between moral and social conventional violations (Smetana, 1989). Because emotion is one of the earliest means by which infants and toddlers understand another's internal experience, it may be unsurprising that emotion is prominent in early social-cognitive development. But because social cognition is a bridge between social experience and later social behavior (Dweck & London, 2004), emotion becomes a fundamental organizer of the child as a social being.

The prominence of emotion in early experience has long been recognized, but its constructive influence in the organization of social perception, self-awareness, and emerging behavioral competence reflects a new appreciation of the role of emotion in early development. Although emotion always retains its capacity to disorganize and undermine effective functioning (as do dysfunctional beliefs and thinking), its organizational, representational, and motivational contributions to developing competence contribute to a new view of the emotionate nature of the developing young child.

## THE EMOTIONATE CHILD IN A RELATIONAL CONTEXT

One reason why emotion has these constructive functions is that the meaning of others' emotional expressions is represented from such an early age. Within the first six months, infants can discriminate facial and vocal expressions of emotion in their caregivers, respond affectively to them, and expect these displays to be expressively congruent (see review by Thompson & Lagattuta, 2006). Because of these early-emerging representations of emotion and its basic meaning, others' emotions color person perceptions, social interactions, and social expectations, and through referential communication they alter the infant's appraisals of other people and objects and, later, the self. Emotion has privileged influence because of its salience and because of the intersubjectivity that is created in recurrent social situations in which infants and adults are sharing common emotional states. This enables shared emotional expression and experience to create a bridge between the baby's internal experience and that of another person as a foundation to psychological understanding of others' affective, evaluative, motivational, and mental states. To the extent that "like me" constitutes an early-emerging conceptual framework for understanding others (Meltzoff, 2007), shared emotional experience contributes to this framework along with action representation. Because these intersubjective experiences begin very early in life, they contribute to emotional appraisals that are a seminal influence on developing social representations, self-understanding, and social competence.

This leads to a second reason why emotion assumes constructive functions in psychological growth: emotional development is embedded in close relational experience. The young child's emoting occurs not just alone but also in a social context—and not just a social context but a responsive, interpretive, regulating, evaluative, and communicative human context that continuously unfolds the meaning of emotional experience for the child. In this context, emotion is observed in another and evoked in the self in ways that contribute to affectively colored representations of people, objects, experiences, and the self. In these contexts, moreover, emotional understanding gradually becomes entrained into cultural,

familial, and intergenerational systems of meaning that connect emotion to moral values, social goals, attributional biases, ideal selves, relational schemas, and other conceptual networks. The relational construction of emotion meaning begins nonverbally in infancy, but with the emergence of language it proceeds in earnest as emotions are labeled, discussed, evaluated, and managed. Close relational experience thus contributes, as Sroufe (1996) notes, to the dyadic regulation of emotion, and it also contributes more generally to the social construction of emotion meaning that enlists emotion constructively—or less productively—into the development of behavioral competence.

Individual differences in relational experience thus loom large in emotional development. They contribute to differences in social expectations and emergent self-awareness and to the meaning systems with which emotional experience and understanding have become associated. More fundamentally, how relational experience has organized emotional development contributes to the emotionate nature of the child. In this respect, therefore, it is not only what relational partners *do* and *say* that guides emotional development, but also *who* provides this guidance and the nature of the child's relationship with this person.

In the pages that follow, research on the emotionate child conducted in our lab and elsewhere is summarized to describe the constructive influence of emotion on behavioral competence in a relational context. We consider first the development of conscience and prosocial motivation, then the growth of self-understanding, and finally the early development of social cognition.

### Conscience and Prosocial Motivation

Contemporary research on early conscience development offers a portrayal of the moral qualities of young children that is a stark contrast to traditional portrayals of preconventional moral judgment (Thompson, 2009). As the studies of Kochanska (e.g., Kochanska, Koenig, Barry, Kim, & Yoon, 2010) and others have shown, young children are motivated to cooperate because of relational incentives within the parent-child relationship, their developing representations of behavioral standards, the emergence of a "moral self" that values behaving in a



responsible fashion, temperamental qualities (including fear and effortful control) that contribute to self-control, and their self-initiated guilty feelings following misbehavior (see Thompson, Meyer, & McGinley, 2006, for a review). These studies suggest that much more than parents' explicit rewards and punishments are important to the growth of morality in young children.

In Kochanska's research, a "mutually responsive orientation" between mothers and their young children is a crucial relational resource for conscience development (Kochanska, 2002). This describes a relationship of reciprocal cooperation characterized by mutual responsiveness and shared positive emotion. This relationship is important to conscience because it sensitizes young children to the mutual obligations of close relationships and creates in the child a willing, eager receptivity to the adult's socialization initiatives. Many studies with children from a range of ages have confirmed that mother-child relationships characterized by such an orientation predict greater advances in conscience development compared to children in relationships without this orientation (see Kochanska, 2002; Thompson et al., 2006, for reviews).

Attachment theorists recognize a mutually responsive orientation as one of the characteristics of a secure attachment, a conclusion that has been confirmed by findings from the MPCLS and other research (see Sroufe et al., 2005). Attachment security is a relational resource to conscience development that is influential either indirectly (such as when it interacts with the child's temperament) or directly. Several studies report that securely-attached young children are more advanced in conscience development (Kochanska, 1995; Laible & Thompson, 2000). But a secure attachment can also moderate the influence of specific parental socialization practices on cooperative conduct. In a longitudinal study, for example, Kochanska, Aksan, Knaack, and Rhines (2004) found that for securely-attached children, the parent's responsiveness and gentle discipline predicted later conscience, but for insecurely-attached children there was no such association. The moderating influence of security can also buffer negative parenting practices, with parental power assertion leading to children's later resentful opposition and antisocial conduct for insecure dyads, but not for secure ones

(see Kochanska, Barry, Stellern, & O'Bleness, 2009). Taken together, these findings suggest that as valuable as are broad indicators of relational quality in the development of conscience, it is important also to understand how specific relational processes function within these relationships to shape young children's moral sensibility.

Our own research has focused on parent-child conversation as an important forum for values transmission and for psychological understanding in young children. The view that parent-child conversation is important to moral socialization has deep roots in developmental theory, particularly in the influence of induction discipline on moral internalization in middle childhood. With new research on conscience development, however, parent-child conversation in early childhood would seem to be especially important to the growth of moral awareness, because this is when preschoolers are developing representations of relational processes and of themselves as moral beings. Our research has focused on parent-child conversations in two contexts. The first is during conflict episodes, the traditional focus of moral socialization research, when parents use verbal arguments to persuade, coerce, negotiate, or otherwise enlist their child's cooperation. The second are conversations outside of the discipline context, in which parents and children reflect on previous episodes of misconduct and good behavior, as a potentially less threatening forum for communicating values in which both partners can discuss the reasons for good or bad conduct. In both circumstances, young children are presented with parental messages concerning responsible behavior and, more importantly, the reasons for acting in that way.

In our initial study, conversations between 4-year-olds and their mothers about past events in which the child either misbehaved or behaved appropriately were recorded and analyzed (Laible & Thompson, 2000). These conversations resemble the everyday discussions shared by mothers and their young children about past behavior, and mothers nominated incidents from the recent past for discussion with the experimenter's help. The conversational transcripts were coded for mothers' references to rules, the consequences of actions, moral evaluative statements (e.g., "that was a nice thing to do"), people's feelings, and other

discourse elements. Later, children were observed in an assessment of conscience (from Kochanska & Aksan, 1995) in which their compliance with a maternal prohibition was observed when mothers were absent. Independent measures of the mother-child relationship—their shared positive affect during the laboratory visit and the security of attachment—were also obtained.

The central finding of this study was that mothers who more frequently discussed people's feelings in their conversations, along with providing morally evaluative statements, had children who were more advanced in conscience development. Attachment security and greater positive affect in mother-child interaction were also predictive of children's conscience, and mothers in secure relationships talked more about people's feelings during their conversations with their children. Thus the role of emotion in early moral sensibility revealed in this study is somewhat different than the fear of punishment and anxiety over loss of love commonly emphasized in traditional moral development theory (Thompson, 2009). Maternal comments that heighten young children's sensitivity to the feelings of other people (or the mother's or child's emotions), in the context of an emotionally warm mother-child relationship, are associated with conscience development.

These findings have been replicated in other research. In a follow-up study, measures of mother-child discourse during conflict episodes at home and in the lab when children were 2 1/2 years old were coded in a similar manner, and children were observed at age 3 in a related measure of conscience development (Laible, 2004; Laible & Thompson, 2002). In this prospective longitudinal study, we again found that maternal conversational references to feelings during lab conflict episodes predicted heightened conscience six months later. In both studies, although maternal references to rules and the consequences of behavior were coded, these maternal discourse elements were *never* predictive of conscience development. In another study, 2- to 3-year-old children whose mothers used reasoning and discussed humanistic concerns in resolving conflict with them were more advanced in moral understanding in kindergarten and first grade (Dunn, Brown, & Maguire, 1995). Together, these findings suggest that what is important about parent-child

conversation is not the clear and consistent articulation of rules and the consequences of rule violation, but how they sensitize young children to the human dimensions of misbehavior and good behavior and help young children to comprehend the effects of their actions on others' feelings. By putting a human face on early moral socialization, emotions become constructively enlisted into the emergence of conscience through relational experience.

The influence of emotional sensitivity and emotion understanding on *prosocial motivation* may have even earlier origins. Recent research by Warneken and Tomasello (2006, 2007) has reinvigorated interest in the early origins of helping behavior in toddlers. In a series of innovative research procedures, they showed that children as young as 14 months old act prosocially toward unfamiliar adults in the absence of reward or praise for doing so. When an adult was engaged in simple tasks that could not be completed without assistance from the child (e.g., retrieving a marker the adult was drawing with that accidentally fell on the floor), all but two of the 18-month-olds and two-thirds of the 14-month-olds helped readily. By contrast, toddlers were much less likely to assist when the same situations arose from the adult's deliberate action (e.g., tossing the marker on the floor rather than dropping it accidentally), and thus when no help was needed.

Although these responses were (generously) described as "altruistic behavior" by the authors, the study was designed to demonstrate something else. In these and other experimental procedures, toddlers exhibit their capacity for shared intentionality: the ability to participate in the intentional activity of another person (Tomasello & Carpenter, 2007). Shared intentionality is a remarkable social-cognitive achievement in children this young because it requires toddlers to discern the intentions and goals underlying another's behavior, and it is thus a very early manifestation of the "mind reading" skills associated with developing theory of mind. Although the experimenters in these studies exhibited minimal emotional expressiveness throughout, in everyday circumstances the detection of another's goals and intentions is readily enabled by the child's attention to the person's emotional expressions. People look pleased when their goals are achieved, and they respond negatively when their intentions are blocked or thwarted (e.g., Repacholi & Gopnik, 1997).

Emotional understanding may thus be an important early motivator of prosocial behavior.

In our lab, we replicated these findings. Using the procedures devised by Warneken and Tomasello (2006) and several similar assessments of our own design, we also found that 18-month-olds were more likely to assist an unfamiliar adult in experimental conditions in which the adult required assistance to complete the task (e.g., the marker was accidentally dropped on the floor) than in control conditions in which the adult required no help at all (e.g., the marker was deliberately tossed on the floor) (Newton, Goodman, Rogers, Burris, & Thompson, 2010). Interestingly, additional experimental conditions of our design in which the adult looked sad when needing help did not elicit greater amounts of helping than conditions in which the adult looked neutral (as in the original study). However, toddlers who helped in these conditions were higher in their emotion state language, a measure of expressive language that is often used as a proxy for emotion understanding. Toddlers who responded most helpfully when the experimenter looked sad and required assistance showed greater indicators of emotion understanding.

These findings concerning conscience development and early prosocial motivation underscore the importance of the emotion connection that young children can establish with the needs of others as a motivator to cooperative, constructive social behavior. This emotional connection begins in the close relationships that young children share with their caregivers, and it is extended to others through the tutoring in people's feelings and needs that caregivers offer in emotion-focused discourse. This kind of discourse is observed more often when mother-child attachments are secure, consistent with the views of attachment theorists that secure attachments provide a psychological secure base in which feelings can be openly shared and discussed with caring adults. By enlisting emotion constructively into social understanding and sensitivity to the needs of people, early relationships contribute to the development of the emotionate child.

### Self-Understanding

The emergence of self-awareness is an extended process. It begins with experiences of agency in early infancy and is supplemented by

physical self-recognition late in the second year. Self-understanding flourishes in the third year with verbal references to feelings, desires, needs, and intentions, assertions of competency and ownership, and categorical identity (such as by gender), together with the young child's sensitivity to behavioral expectations and the emergence of self-conscious evaluative emotions (see review by Thompson, 2006a). It is not surprising, therefore, that researchers have discovered that in addition to describing themselves in terms of physical traits and ability, young children are also capable of characterizing their internal, psychological characteristics. Using carefully designed interview procedures—sometimes involving puppets to aid the young child's self-description—several research groups have found that preschoolers describe themselves using internally consistent, reliable references to internal, personality-like characteristics.

The characteristics that young children choose to describe themselves are emotional in quality. They include self-perceptions of timidity, agreeableness, proneness to negative affect, and positive or negative self-concept for 4- to 5-year-olds (Brown, Mangelsdorf, Agathen, & Ho, 2008; Goodvin, Meyer, Thompson, & Hayes, 2008); depression-anxiety, aggression-hostility, as well as peer acceptance and social and academic competence for 4 1/2- to 7 1/2-year-olds (Measelle, Ablow, Cowan, & Cowan, 1998); positive or negative self-concept in multiple areas of competence for 4- and 5-year-olds (Marsh, Ellis, & Craven, 2002); and self-acceptance and self-control for 5 1/2-year-olds (Eder, 1990). Some evidence shows that these self-descriptions are consistent in year-to-year assessments (Measelle et al., 1998), although this is not always true (Goodvin et al., 2008). The validity of these self-descriptions is suggested by findings that how preschoolers describe themselves is consistent with descriptions provided by their mothers, fathers, or teachers (Brown et al., 2008; Eder & Mangelsdorf, 1997; Measelle et al., 1998). However, the modest associations between children's self-descriptions and the descriptions provided by parents or teachers suggest that considerable additional sources of variance contribute to young children's self-understanding. Early self-awareness is not merely a result of Mead's looking-glass self.

It appears that, in addition to others' attributions, young children have a rich experience of themselves that is emotional in nature. It is not difficult to see why. Young children who are timid and shy carry this emotional quality with them into daily social situations where their anxious reserve is as salient to them as it is to others. Those who are more prone to negative outbursts and tantrums are often as perplexed by their emotional upheavals and the consequences as are the peers and adults around them. Preschoolers who are positive and socially outgoing likewise regularly experience the salient emotional satisfactions of interacting with other people. When young children respond to interview prompts about what they are like, they are drawing on a rich experiential history of living in their own skin that is primarily emotional in quality.

Close relationships are important to developing self-understanding, but perhaps not exclusively because of how young children appropriate the descriptions of them that they overhear or caregivers tell them. In addition, the security of their attachments and the emotional well-being of their caregivers contribute to the emotional experiences from which young children derive a sense of themselves. In our research, young children's self-descriptions were longitudinally elicited from a puppet-assisted interview when they were 4 and 5 years of age, and the security of attachment and maternal perceptions of parenting stress and depressive symptomatology were also measured at each age (Goodvin et al., 2008). We found that positive self-concept at age 5 was predicted by the security of attachment at age 4 (with age 5 attachment security controlled) and by a composite measure of maternal depression/parenting stress at both ages. Children in secure attachments at age 4 had a more positive self-concept one year later, but children whose mothers reported greater stress and depression viewed themselves more negatively.

These findings highlight the importance of emotion to developing self-understanding and the significance of relational experience to early self-awareness. Because of this, young children growing up in contexts of relational and family stress construct their self-concept around experiences of greater challenge, anxiety, and uncertainty compared with preschoolers living in more secure and affirmative family settings. One reason why self-understanding may not be consistent in year-to-year

assessments, therefore, is that the emotional climate of the family may change over time in ways that affect developing self-awareness. In each case, however, emotion in the context of close relationships is an organizer of early self-understanding.

## Social Cognition

As noted earlier, emotion is a core feature of early social representations, from infants' expectations for the quality of parental care to the emergence of desire psychology in the second and third years. Considerable research indicates that infants generate expectations for specific caregivers during the first year based on the affective quality of their experiences with those adults (see Thompson, 2006a, for a review). Later, generalized representations of people and relationships emerge from these relationships that are applied to how children approach specific individuals. But how early are person-specific relational expectations generalized to representations for people and relationships in general? Such a question is central to attachment theory, and some evidence shows the importance of emotion to this generalization from specific to global social representations.

In a report by Johnson, Dweck, and Chen (2007), evidence for infants' internal working models of attachment was claimed from the differential looking times of securely-attached and insecurely-attached infants to short video animations of the actions of large and small colored ovals moving on an inclined surface. Twelve- to sixteen-month-old infants were first habituated to the animation of the large, red oval moving away from the small, blue oval as it traversed an incline, at which time the smaller oval pulsed while the sound of a human baby cry was heard. After habituation, infants saw another animation in which either the large oval continued to move away from the smaller one as it traversed another incline (the "unresponsive caregiver") or the large oval backed down the original incline to rejoin the smaller one (the "responsive caregiver"). In each case, the baby cry continued to the end of the animation. Whereas the looking times of insecurely-attached infants did not differ for the two outcome conditions, securely-attached infants looked significantly longer at the "unresponsive caregiver" condition to



reflect their greater interest in this (presumably unexpected) outcome. According to the primary author of this study, the baby cry was important for guiding observers' interpretation of the actions as "distressing to the baby circle" (Johnson, personal communication, February 19, 2010). Owing to infants' differential emotional associations with the sound of an infant cry, this may also account for the attachment group differences observed in this study.

In older children, differences in social cognition can be more clearly and finely measured. In the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development (NICHD SECCYD), for example, children ages 4 1/2 and 6 were presented with a series of assessments of their social-cognitive understanding of people and relationships. Negative attribution bias was assessed at each age, for example, based on children's responses to short stories in which the central character acts with ambiguous intent. Social problem-solving skills were evaluated at 54 months as the variety of constructive solutions children could generate to social problems, such as how to make friends with another child. In first grade, there was an assessment of children's aggressive solutions to vignettes about story characters with ambiguous motives, and there was also an index of children's self-reported loneliness.

These are some of the earliest ages at which explicit measures of social-cognitive understanding have been assessed. Consistent with the nature of emergent social representations in the early years, social-cognitive understanding at this age is strongly emotional in quality, focused on themes of loneliness, aggression, hostility, and, more positively, constructive means of solving emotion-laden social dilemmas that are common in peer encounters. Emotion is prominent in young children's interactions with peers, their ways of representing individuals within the peer environment (Heyman & Gelman, 1999), and their general social representations of other children and relational interaction.

Raikes and Thompson (2008a) sought to understand whether children's early relational experiences in the family would contribute to predicting individual differences in their responses to these social-cognitive

measures. From the NICHD SECCYD data set, we selected measures of maternal care. These included sensitivity scores obtained from mother-child play sessions at 15, 24, and 36 months (early sensitivity) or 54 months (later sensitivity), and measures of maternal depressive symptomatology at 15, 24, and 36 months (early depression) or later (later depression). Finally, we obtained measures of mother-child relationship—specifically, the security of attachment at 15 months (in the Strange Situation), 24 months (using an observer-report Attachment Q-sort), and 36 months (using a modified Strange Situation procedure). With these measures of early mother-child interaction and their developing relationship to predict the child's later social-cognitive understanding, Table 2.1 summarizes the main effects.

We found that early and later measures of maternal care predicted social cognition at the end of the preschool years, but only weakly.

**Table 2.1 Summary of main results from regressions predicting later social-cognitive understanding from early mother-child relationships**

Note: Summary of main results from Raikes & Thompson (2008); interactions among predictors omitted.

	Negative Attributions 54 mos	Socially Competent Solutions 54 mos.	Loneliness 1st grade	Aggressive Solutions 1st grade	Negative Attributions 1st grade
Early Maternal Depression					+
Early Maternal Sensitivity		+		-	
Later Maternal Depression					
Later Maternal Sensitivity				-	
15 month Attachment					
24 month Attachment		+	-		
36 month Attachment	Avoidant > Secure	Avoidant < Secure	Resistant > Secure		Resistant > Secure

Note: All associations reported in this chart were significant at or lesser than the  $p < .05$  level.

Children were more likely to provide competent solutions to social problems and fewer aggressive responses when mothers were sensitive in the early years, and the early maternal depression composite was associated with children's negative attribution bias in first grade. Much stronger prediction to later social-cognitive understanding emerged from the security of attachment, a measure of the parent-child relationship, especially at 24 and 36 months. Strange Situation classifications at 15 months were not associated with later measures at all, but children who were securely attached at 24 months were more likely to provide socially competent solutions and less likely to report loneliness at later ages. At 36 months, security was predictive of four of the five social-cognitive measures, with secure children later exhibiting fewer negative attributions, reporting less loneliness, and providing more competent solutions to social problems with peers. Consistent with the expectations of attachment theory and with many findings from the MPCLS (Sroufe et al., 2005), early caregiving relationships were strongly associated with later social-cognitive understanding in ways that may reflect the generalization of expectations and emotions from the attachment relationship to beliefs about people and relationships at later ages.

Why would the security of attachment become a stronger predictor of social cognition at later ages? One straightforward explanation is that later measures of attachment security were simply closer in time to the social-cognitive measures they predicted and this strengthened their association, although this does not seem to have occurred with respect to measures of maternal sensitivity and depressive symptomatology. A more interesting explanation is based on the view that the security of attachment has developmental influences relevant to other emergent achievements in psychological growth at that time (Thompson, 2000). At 36 months, young children are gaining considerable insight into the internal characteristics and motivators of people's behavior. They are at the early stages of developing theory of mind, their emotion understanding is expanding considerably, and they are far more capable of mentally representing the causes and consequences of relational interactions than they are at earlier ages. By contrast, an infant in the Strange Situation has only

rudimentary capacities for social understanding. As a consequence, a secure attachment at 36 months is more likely to influence young children's emergent representations of their peers, relational processes, and themselves as social partners than would attachment security at earlier ages.

The studies of social and emotional development discussed thus far highlight two essential features of the emotionate child. First, emotions assume a constructive function in the organization of conscience and prosocial motivation, self-understanding, social representations, and other early achievements because they are prominent in young children's everyday experience and color relationships with others, motivational incentives, evaluations of people and events, and interpretations of others' characteristics. Emotions are organizational in this manner because they constitute a psychological connection between the internal world of the self and another person, and are thus a common referent as a basis for socioemotional understanding. Second, emotions assume these constructive functions because their developmental influences are guided by early relationships. In relational contexts, emotions are interpreted, connected to other human concerns (such as moral values and respect for others), regulated, and incorporated into developing personality and social competence. Relational experience thus colors how emotions influence behavioral competence and self-understanding—whether they contribute to sympathetic or hostile attribution biases, for example, positive or negative self-concept, and cooperative or competitive relations with others. The emotionate qualities of the child develop in the context of relational experience, and one of the fundamental challenges of developmental scientists is to unpack relational experience to better understand its constituent influences.

## DEVELOPMENT OF THE EMOTIONATE CHILD

Many features of early relationships contribute to the constructive incorporation of emotion and emotion understanding into behavioral competence. The emotional climate of the family creates a context of emotional demands, models, evaluations, and coaching that shapes young children's daily emotional experience and the emotion regulatory

challenges they face. The quality of parental responsiveness affects how children perceive that their emotional experiences are evaluated and the support they receive in managing their feelings and enlisting them adaptively into social interaction. The emotional expressions of relational partners contribute to the young child's evaluations of people, events, and behavior and their association with broader values, goals, and standards. These and other features of emotional development begin early in life, but with the growth of language and parent-child conversation the socialization of emotion and its incorporation into developing behavioral competence proceeds in earnest.

Language is a significant catalyst for growth in the emotionate child for several reasons (Thompson, 2006b; Thompson, Laible, & Ontai, 2003). First, language provides semantic referents for internal, psychological processes, such as emotions, that are otherwise inchoate, elusive, or confusing to very young children. Language in conversation further embeds these lexical referents into cultural systems of meaning and socially evaluative standards: whether "shy" is good or bad and "needing help" motivates help-giving or judgments of weakness depends on the personal and social context in which these concepts are acquired. Second, conversational discourse directs young children's attention selectively to features of an event that are important to the adult and, in so doing, entrains the child's interpretive focus accordingly. This can occur when conversation occurs *during* a shared experience (Ornstein, Haden, & Hedrick, 2004), in *retrospective* conversation about past events (Nelson & Fivush, 2004), and in *anticipatory* discussions of future events (Hudson, 2002). In each case, the caregiver's conversational prompts guide the child's construal of experience in light of the adult's values, expectations, goals, and sociocultural orientation, such as by talking about what other people were intending rather than the outcomes of their actions alone. As this example illustrates, adults often guide children's interpretations of events by drawing attention to inferences of the internal motivators of people's actions that young children might not attend to or appropriately construe.

A third reason for the importance of language in the development of the emotionate child is how it enables sharing, understanding, and

evaluation of internal experience in discourse with another person. Because language lexicalizes psychological processes like emotion, it can objectify the child's internal experience for shared discussion, elaboration, and evaluation. This enables the adult to provide insight into the child's internal experience, but at times it can confront both partners with divergent constructions of the child's experiences, feelings, and motives (see, e.g., Levine, Stein, & Liwag, 1999, and below). In this sense, conversations about the child's internal experience may provide young children with a tutorial in shared and divergent mental states, which is a crucial development in theory of mind. Finally, the growth of language enables the reconstruction of the infant's implicit representations of other people and the self into a more explicit, conscious system of representations that are influenced both by direct experience and by the secondary representations mediated by language. This makes psychological understanding more flexible, accessible, and expansive.

Because of these contributions of language to developing psychological understanding, many contemporary researchers agree with the conclusion of Carpendale and Lewis (2004) that constructing an understanding of others' internal states requires experiences of cooperative social interaction and exposure to talk about mental states (see also Harris, de Rosnay, & Pons, 2005). But the importance of language in conversational discourse means much more. In conversation, an adult's language also conveys evaluations of events and people, moral judgments, causal attributions, trait characterizations of people (including the young child), lessons about socially appropriate conduct, and other messages that are incorporated into discussions of what people are feeling, thinking, and intending. Through parent-child conversation, in other words, the intergenerational transmission of values, expectations, biases, and judgments occurs as young children are learning about the internal world of people.

In this light, the quality of the parent-child relationship is an important part of the conversational context because of how it colors the use of language in parent-child discourse and the psychological understanding it fosters. Relationships influence what is said—whether young children's experience is validated and elaborated or questioned, denied, or criticized—and the evaluations, judgments, and attributions that

accompany this communication. Relationship quality influences how it is said, and the nonverbal expressions of warmth, doubt, or rejection that accompany words. Relationships also influence the impact of what is said, because of the child's trust or uncertainty in the source of the message. The influence of parent-child conversation on the development of the emotionate child is thus an interaction of the semantic and pragmatic context of language and the source of the messages the child receives.

### Development of Emotion Understanding

The growth of emotion understanding—a core competence of the emotionate child—illustrates these influences on developing psychological understanding and social competence.

Considerable research indicates that early emotion understanding is enhanced by the amount and quality of emotion-focused conversational discourse between parent and child (see reviews by Dunn, 2002, and Thompson, 2006a). The frequency with which mothers refer to people's emotions and the amount of causal language related to emotion are each associated with preschoolers' emotion understanding. In addition, mothers' elaborative discourse style when discussing emotion-related experiences—in which shared experiences are discussed in depth, with the child prompted by open-ended "wh-" questions to fill in details, and mothers provide evaluations of the child's responses to confirm or correct what the child has said—is also associated with greater emotion understanding.

A study by Ontai and Thompson (2002) helps explain why. We observed 3-year-olds and their mothers as they together read a storybook with emotional themes and also discussed a recent event in which the child had experienced negative emotion. From transcriptions of their conversations, we coded several aspects of the mother's discourse. These included (a) the *frequency* of her references to emotion, (b) her description of the *causes* of emotion, (c) portrayals of the *outcomes* of emotion, (d) *definitions* of emotion (such as explaining an emotion term), (e) *linking events* in the child's life to the situation or story to help the child better understand the emotion, and (f) *requests for information* from

the child related to emotion. These elements of maternal emotion-related discourse were highly interrelated, as described by the correlational associations presented in Figure 2.1. When mothers made frequent conversational references to emotion, they also provided their preschoolers with considerable additional information about the causes, consequences, and significance of emotional reactions, and solicited from the child additional information about emotion as it related to the child's experience. We also coded the mother's overall elaborative discourse style and found that each of the discourse features in Figure 2.2 was significantly associated with elaborative discourse.

Early emotion understanding is thus enhanced by conversation with an adult who elaborates and enriches the child's conceptions of the meaning and significance of emotion. The importance of elaborative discourse to the development of autobiographical memory is well-established (Nelson & Fivush, 2004), but these and other studies indicate that elaborative discourse is important to emotional understanding as well (see also Laible, 2004; Laible & Song, 2006). Furthermore, experimental studies confirm that mothers can develop the skills to converse in a more elaborative manner with offspring, and the resulting change in maternal conversational style is associated with the predicted effects on young children's representations of experience (see Wareham &

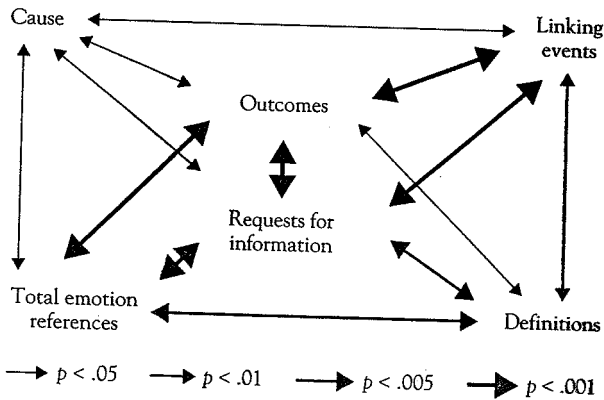
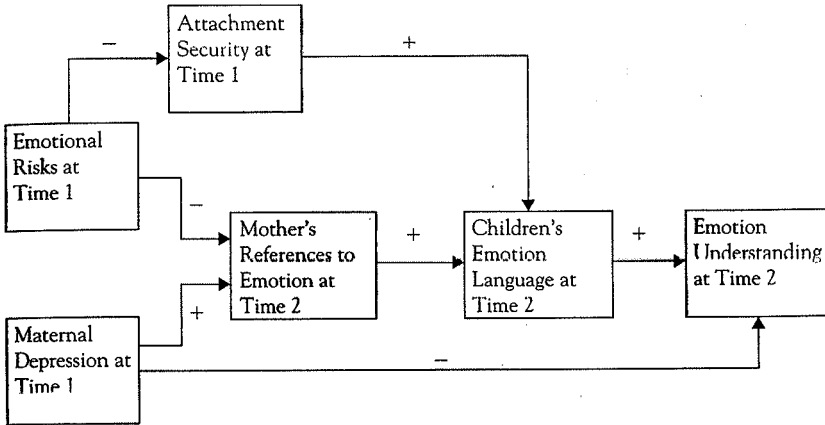


Figure 2.1 Correlational associations between maternal discourse elements (from Ontai & Thompson, 2002; reprinted from Thompson et al., 2003)





**Figure 2.2** Relations between family emotional climate, attachment security, mothers' references to emotion, child emotion language, and child emotion understanding in an at-risk sample

(from Raikes & Thompson, 2006, 2008b; reprinted from Thompson, 2010)

Salmon, 2006). Much less is known about other features of maternal discourse that are associated with elaborative style (recall the association of mothers' feeling statements with morally evaluative statements in Laible & Thompson's [2000] study of early conscience) and their consequences for social and emotional understanding.

Conversation is important in a relational context. Mothers in secure attachment relationships converse with their preschoolers in a more elaborative manner than do mothers in insecure relationships (see Reese, 2002, for a review). This may help account for why securely-attached young children are more advanced in emotion understanding, particularly their understanding of negative emotions (Laible, 2004; Laible & Thompson, 1998; Raikes & Thompson, 2006; Steele, Steele, Croft, & Fonagy, 1999). Especially when mothers talk about negative emotional experiences, which are likely to be more confusing and troubling to young children than other events, their elaborative style can validate children's feelings and help them understand and manage these experiences, as well as helping children understand these emotions in other people. This is consistent with Bretherton's (1993) portrayal of the more candid, "open, fluid communication" shared by

securely-attached mothers and children that enables greater emotional disclosure, particularly of upsetting or unsettling experiences. When this occurs, security is fostered by the parent's understanding and reassurance conveyed in conversation, and their relationship becomes a psychological secure base for the child (Koren-Karie, Oppenheim, & Getzler-Yosef, 2008).

The importance of this psychological secure base was recently illustrated in a study in our lab in which mothers and their 4 1/2-year-old children were observed while they together recalled two recent experiences in which the child felt sad and angry (Waters et al., 2009). Children varied in how much they sought to avoid these uncomfortable conversational topics by changing the topic to something else, leaving the mother to do something else, or explicitly refusing to talk further. We counted the frequency of these indicators of child avoidance, and found that they were predicted by two characteristics of mother-child conversation. The first was a rating of maternal validation from conversational transcripts based on whether the mother accepted the child's perspective on the recalled event, showed empathy for the child's feelings, and put the child's viewpoint (rather than the mother's) at the center of the conversation. Mothers with high ratings for validation had children with low conversational avoidance. The second was the security of attachment: when mothers and children were in secure relationships, there was less child avoidance. Indeed, mothers in secure attachments were also significantly more validating than were mothers in insecure relationships. These findings provide an empirical elaboration on Bretherton's portrayal of the more "open, fluid communication" shared by securely-attached mothers and children.

Taken together, these studies suggest that the early development of emotion understanding is guided both by the content of mother-child emotion-focused conversation and the emotional support afforded by these conversations. What mothers say contributes to young children's understanding of the causes, consequences, and meaning of emotional experiences in themselves and others. The emotional support mothers provide, such as through validating comments, contributes to the young child's developing confidence that emotions are important and can be

comprehended and managed. Mothers in secure relationships are distinctive in each of these conversational qualities, which likely contributes to the greater emotion understanding of their offspring and to the continuing security of the parent-child relationship.

When families are under stress, these conversational elements of developing emotion understanding become especially important, as are the relationships from which they derive. Unfortunately, many young children live in family environments characterized by economic and emotional stress that impairs the development of secure parent-child relationships, and the emotional climate of the family is likely to hinder the growth of emotional competence in these settings. More significantly, emotion may become enlisted for these children into the development of negative attributional biases, impoverished self-concept, and critical (rather than sympathetic) appraisals of the feelings of others. For these reasons, study of the development of the emotionate child in at-risk families is essential to an understanding of how emotional development occurs in contexts of stress and challenge.

Our study recruited a sample of mothers and children from Early Head Start, an early intervention program for families living in poverty (Raikes & Thompson, 2006, 2008b; Thompson, 2010). When children were 2 years old, mothers completed inventories concerning depressive symptomatology and emotional risk factors (e.g., alcohol or drug abuse in the family; domestic violence; a family member with anger management problems), and child-mother attachment security was assessed. One year later, mothers and children were observed discussing recent events when the child felt happy, angry, or sad. From transcriptions of their conversations, the frequency of mothers' references to emotion was counted. We also obtained two measures of the child's emotion language: the child's use of negative emotion words and the child's ability to independently generate labels for emotional states. These measures were highly correlated, so they were combined for analysis. Children also completed a measure of emotion understanding based on Denham's work (see Denham et al., 2002).

The primary findings of the regression analyses to predict emotion understanding are presented in Figure 2.2. Emotion understanding was

associated with children's emotion language and by mothers' conversational references to emotion at age 3 in a now-familiar pattern of discourse influences. But mothers' emotion-related references were negatively associated with two antecedent influences from a year earlier: emotional risks in the family and depressive symptomatology. In this at-risk sample of families, mothers who reported a greater number of emotional stresses were less likely to talk about emotions when reminiscing with their children a year later, perhaps because emotional issues remained troubling matters that restricted mothers' emotion conversational access with their offspring. By contrast, maternal depression was positively associated with maternal emotional references a year later, perhaps because of the ruminative thinking about emotional issues characteristic of depression. Despite its association with mothers' emotion references in conversation with the child, maternal depression had an independent negative association with children's emotion understanding at age 3. This may have derived from other, unmeasured influences of maternal depressive symptomatology on the family emotional climate, such as the hopelessness, hostility, and self-critical attributions characteristic of depressed individuals.

Finally, as other studies have found, a secure attachment was predictive of emotion understanding at age 3, but the effects of attachment were mediated by children's emotion language in conversation with their mothers. This suggests that one of the benefits of attachment security is how it enables young children more readily to reflect on, identify, and understand emotions—particularly negative emotions—which may be one of the benefits of the more "open communication" shared by securely-attached children with their mothers (Bretherton, 1993).

Taken together, these findings confirm the importance of mother-child conversation and attachment security to the development of emotion understanding in young children living in at-risk families as well as middle-class homes. But conversational discourse is also affected by broader stresses in family life, particularly for the mother. The emotional turmoil she experienced as much as a year earlier, and her own depressive symptomatology at this time, significantly influenced the frequency of emotion-related references in reminiscing with her young

child. In a sense, her capacity to function as a psychological secure base for her child is contingent on her coping with the emotional demands she encounters, and evidence from this study shows that maternal depression had other, negative consequences for the developing emotion understanding of her child. Other analyses from this study showed that economic stresses had consequences for conversational quality and developing emotion understanding comparable to emotional stresses. The development of the emotionate child is thus affected, directly and indirectly, by the broader family emotional climate as it influences the growth of emotion skills and understanding through conversational discourse in parent-child relationships.

### Development of Emotion Regulation

Emotion regulation is another core competence of the emotionate child because it contributes to enlisting emotions constructively into behavioral competence. It is important not because unregulated emotions inevitably lead to impulsive, disorganized, or incompetent responses, because emotions are regulated from birth and often function adaptively (Thompson, 2011; Thompson, Lewis, & Calkins, 2008). Rather, emotion regulation develops as multiple explicit and implicit capacities for emotional management emerge, become integrated, and contribute to more effective goal-directed behavior. The young child's developing understanding of emotion, and the guidance and support of close relationships, are important influences.

Caregivers provide multifaceted contributions to the growth of emotion regulation early in life (see Thompson & Meyer, 2007, for a review). Their proactive efforts and direct interventions help keep children's emotions within manageable limits, and their emotion coaching contributes to children's self-initiated efforts to regulate their own feelings. The influence of the family emotional climate and parents' supportive or critical responses to children's emotions affect the development of emotion regulation as well as the growth of emotion understanding. Importantly, these socialization efforts occur in the context of young children's developing understanding of emotion regulation processes, about which much less is known. Cole, Dennis, Smith-Simon, and

Cohen (2009) reported that 3- and 4-year-olds could generate strategies for managing sadness and anger, and an increasing proportion of children recognized certain strategies as more appropriate and effective than others (e.g., aggression vs. choosing an alternative activity in response to peer provocation). Davis, Levine, Lench, and Quas (2010) reported that 5- and 6-year-olds could generate metacognitive strategies (involving mental processes to manage feelings, such as changing thoughts or goals) for purposes of emotion management.

In our study with 4 1/2-year-olds described earlier, children responded to an Emotion Regulation Problem Solving interview in which puppets enacted short story vignettes that evoked anger, sadness, or fear in the story character (Waters et al., 2010). Following this, the puppets enacted different emotion regulation strategies (i.e., problem-solving, avoidance, cognitive restructuring, and venting), and children evaluated the effectiveness of each strategy on the basis of the extent to which they thought it would reduce the intensity of the story character's emotions. Young children consistently regarded venting as the least effective strategy, but beyond this, effectiveness ratings were emotion-specific. Avoidance was deemed more effective, for example, than anger or fear in managing sadness. Further analyses revealed that securely-attached children were significantly less likely to endorse venting for emotion regulation than were insecurely-attached children. Perhaps owing to the relational contexts in which venting commonly occurs, children in secure relationships perceived it as being overall a less useful means of managing their emotions.

Recall that mothers and children in this study also together discussed two recent experiences in which the child felt sad and angry. Although they were not explicitly instructed to do so, the large majority (88%) of the mothers in this sample spontaneously talked about different means for managing emotion in these situations, and many commented about the effectiveness of these strategies for making one feel better. Mothers commented most often on the effectiveness of problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, attentional redirection, and cognitive reappraisal when discussing emotion-evocative past experiences of the child. By contrast, the effectiveness of venting was much less often endorsed

by these mothers. Although young children often vent their negative emotions when they are frustrated or sad, they recognize that this does not help them to feel better, partly because of what they have learned from their mothers.

These are situations, of course, in which emotion and its regulation are discussed in response to imaginary stories. What about actual instances in which parents and children must together manage the child's emotions? In this study, parents and children participated in a task that was designed to frustrate the child (i.e., Stansbury & Sigman's [2000] "denied request task"). Subsequently, mothers and children independently watched a video of their interaction in the task and, at the point when the child's peak negative emotional intensity had been reached on the videotape, each was asked how the child felt at that moment (Waters et al., 2009). Well-trained coders also rated the child's emotional expressions at that moment on the videotape to provide an independent assessment of the child's emotional arousal. When the emotion attributions of mothers and children were compared, we were surprised to find that they agreed only 40% of the time, with mothers especially underidentifying anger in their children when compared with children's self-reports (see Figure 2.3). By contrast, independent observers' ratings agreed with children's self-reports 54% of the time, with high agreement when children self-reported anger and sadness, and less when children reported feeling happy. The low agreement between mothers and their children concerning the child's emotions during an earlier frustration task was surprising in light of the fact that mothers and children each watched a video of this episode before responding. But this is not an unprecedented finding (see Levine et al., 1999), and it reflects the challenges inherent when interpreting a child's emotions in a complex social situation in which the adult is personally participating. This is the challenge facing any parent who seeks to coach a young child's emotion regulation.

Mothers varied in the extent to which their attributions of emotion to their children agreed with the child's self-reports. Two characteristics of mother and child predicted the extent of mother-child concordance. First, mothers who reported believing in the importance of attending to

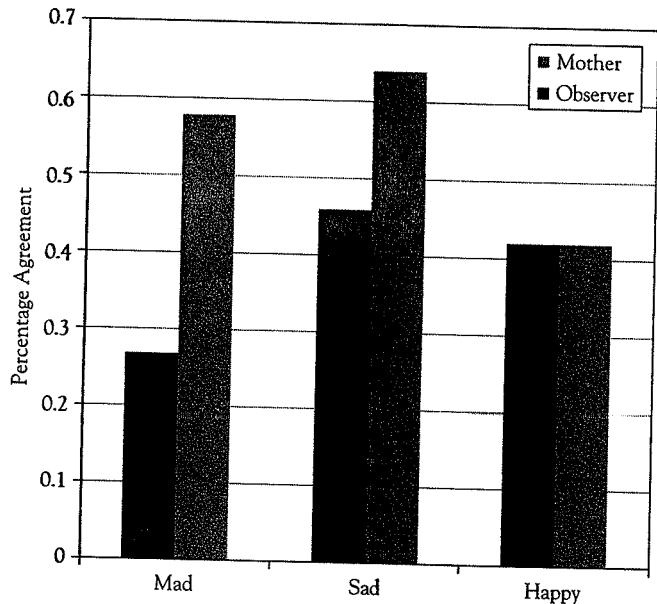


Figure 2.3 Concordance of child self-reports of emotion with mother and observer reports

(from Waters et al., 2010)

and accepting their own emotions (based on responses to a subscale of the Trait Meta-Mood Scale by Salovey, Mayer, Goldman, Turvey, & Palfai, 1995) were more likely to provide emotion attributions that agreed with children's self-reports of emotion. Second, mothers in secure attachments with their children were also more concordant in their emotion attributions with the child. In short, sensitivity to the child's emotional experience, which is an essential prerequisite to efforts to help the child manage emotions, was based on the security of attachment and the mother's respect for her own emotional experiences.

In these studies of the development of emotion understanding and emotion regulation, relational experience of various kinds guides the enlistment of emotion into social and behavioral competence. They include the sensitivity with which caregivers perceive and respond to children's emotions, the elaborativeness, support, and coaching provided by parent-child conversations about children's feelings, and the emotional climate of family life that offers models of emotion expression and coping,



even in conditions of stress. These and other elements of early relational experience enable young children to better identify, understand, and manage their feelings, to enlist their emotions more constructively into social interactions and motivated action, and to respond more sensitively and appropriately to the feelings of others. Because many of these relational features distinguish secure from insecure parent-child relationships, it is not surprising that securely-attached children are not only more advanced in emotion understanding but are also more competent at emotion regulation (Gilliom, Shaw, Beck, Schonberg, & Lukon, 2002; Kochanska, 2001; Nachmias et al., 1996) and in the enlistment of emotion into social and behavioral competence (see review by Thompson, 2008a).

## CONCLUSION

The developing child is an emotionate child. Despite the cognitivist orientation of contemporary portrayals of the child, such a view has deep roots in developmental theory and everyday thinking about child development. One of the most influential expressions of this view is attachment theory, and especially the organizational perspective on development reflected in the MPCLS that this volume honors. The ideas from this work that emotions are central, especially in the context of primary relationships, to the organization of personality development, and that attachment relationships are emotionally regulatory and are forums for emotion understanding, are well reflected in the research described in this chapter.

Furthermore, the view that the emotional qualities of early experiences, particularly in close relationships, contribute to the development of dynamic representations of self, other people, and social interactions that are affectively colored, relationally guided, and integrative is central to the internal working models construct of attachment theory, and also to the work discussed here. The idea that mental representations of this kind emerge from early relational experience, provide guidance about how to interact with others and expectations for close relationships, and constitute interpretive filters that affect constructions of new

relationships and partners is one of Bowlby's most theoretically provocative ideas, even though research directly enlisting the internal working models construct faces formidable conceptual and methodological challenges (Thompson, 2008b; Thompson & Raikes, 2003). Research on the emotionate child provides a means of exploring these provocative formulations using ideas from outside of as well as within attachment theory. In many respects, the generativity of attachment theory is its articulation of several important ideas about early development that motivate research of this kind. The work of Sroufe and Egeland and their colleagues has helped to make these ideas an empirical reality and is thus an inspiration for us all.

In the end, why is it important to recognize developing children as emotionate in nature? One reason is that it underscores the constructive significance of emotion for competence in a range of developmental domains, from sociability to self-regulation to school readiness and academic achievement (see Duncan & Magnuson, 2010). Another reason is that it highlights the centrality of emotion to young children's developing representations of themselves, significant others, and the relationships that color social life. Equally important is a third reason: Recognizing the developing child as emotionate draws our attention to the importance of attending to the development of socioemotional health from early in life and to the conditions in early childhood that create risk to early childhood mental health. In viewing the young child as an emotionate child, we begin to appreciate that a strong and positive sense of self, security in close relationships, and confidence in encounters with other people are essential psychological resources for success in the wider world.

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