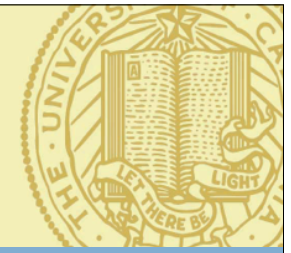


Mechanisms of Socio-Cultural Differences in Young Children's Emotional Competence: The Influence of Mother-Child Relationships



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Introduction

- Developing emotional competence is a crucial achievement in early childhood.
- Research has found that children with greater emotional competence have fewer behaviour problems (Izard et al., 2001), and better peer relationships (Fabes et al., 2001).
- For children at socio-demographic risk, enhanced emotional competence buffers the development of behavior problems (Schultz et al., 2001).
- To better understand how socio-cultural experiences influence children's developing emotional competence, the current study assesses mechanisms of socio-cultural differences in children's emotional competence in relation to aspects of the mother-child relationship.

Method

Participants

- A diverse community sample of 65 four-year-olds and their mothers participated in a short-term longitudinal study.
 - Time 1 children were 4 years old
 - Time 2 children were 5.5 years old
- 43% Males; 57% Females
- Maternal Ethnicity: 26% Latino; 74% Non-Latino

Measures

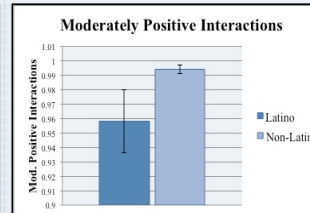
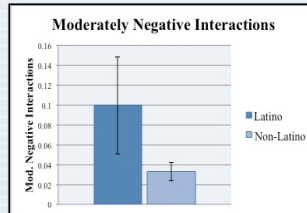
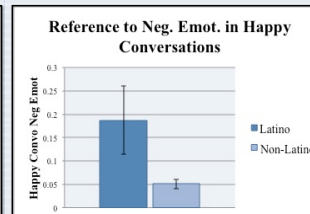
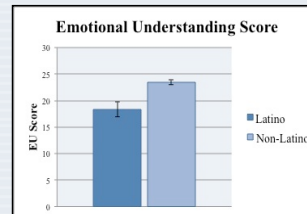
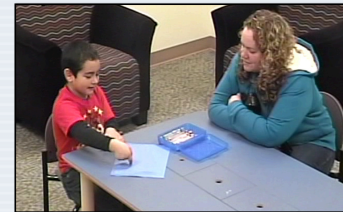
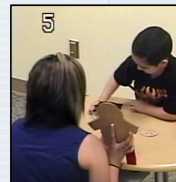
- **Maternal ethnicity** was drawn from maternal self-reports.
- Emotional competence was indexed as children's **Emotion Understanding (EU)** assessed at Time 1 using a widely used puppet-based task which tests children's receptive and expressive emotion knowledge in stories of happy, mad, sad, and scared emotions (Denham, 1986). The test was given in the child's preferred language. Scores were standardized.
- Mother's references to positive and negative emotions were coded at Time 1 from transcripts of mother-child reminiscing conversations about a recent time when the child was happy (**Happy Convo Pos. and Neg. Emot.**).
- The affective quality of mothers' interactions with their children was coded at Time 2 using video-taped observations of play-based mother-child interaction (**Moderately Negative Interactions, Moderately Positive Interactions**).
- Mother-child conversations and mother-child interactions occurred in whatever language the mother and child preferred.

Results

- ANOVA (I) assessed whether Latino children significantly differed in their EU.
 - The test did yield significant results
 - Maternal Ethnicity: EU [$F(1,63) = 15.2, p < .01$]
- ANOVAs (II) assessed whether Latino mothers were more likely to reference positive or negative emotions than non-Latino mothers.
 - Only the test of negative emotions was significant results.
 - Happy Convo Neg. Emot. [$F(1,59) = 7.57, p < .01$]
- ANOVA (III) assessed whether there were any statistically significant mean differences between the affective qualities of Latino and non-Latino mothers' interactions with their children
 - The tests for both were significant.
 - Mod. Negative Interactions [$F(1,49) = 4.79, p < .05$]
 - Mod. Positive Interactions [$F(1,49) = 7.76, p < .01$]

Results

- Post-hoc tests were conducted for the significant ANOVAs to determine the direction of the main effects and revealed that:
 - Latino children had much lower EU scores than their non-Latino counterparts.
 - Latino mothers were more likely to reference negative emotions in conversations that were framed to be Happy ones.
 - Latino mothers were more likely to interact moderately negatively with their children and were less likely to share moderately positive interactions with their children in the mother-child play.
- In order to understand the underlying mechanisms of these findings, regression models were run to examine predictions of individual differences in child emotional understanding based on aspects of the mother-child relationship. The models did not yield any significant results.



Discussion

- **Does children's emotion understanding differ based upon maternal ethnicity?**
- Results indicate that there do appear to be differences.
- **Are there cultural differences in the mothers parenting?**
- Yes. Importantly, Latino mothers are not simply talking more about emotions overall. Instead, we found that Latino mothers were more likely to refer to *negative* emotions in conversations intended to have a positive feeling.
- Latino mothers were also more likely to express negative affect in their interactions with their children.
- **What are the mechanisms of socio-cultural differences in children's emotional understanding?**
- The explanatory mechanisms still remain unclear but there are several possible explanations of these differences that warrant future research to better understand the sources of these socio-cultural differences in children's emotion understanding.
- First, Latino mothers may engage in less deliberate teaching and socializing communication about emotions and emotional states.
- Second, it is possible that Latino mothers parenting focuses more on the child being well mannered and less on a child expressing their emotions.
- Third, other research has shown that Latino mothers have a belief that children acquire emotions on their own and don't need to be taught (Rivera & Dunsmore, 2011). This view may explain why Latino children showed lower scores on the emotional recognition task.
- Last, Latino mothers may have viewed the emotion conversation as an instructional task in which they took a stronger demeanor that might have been coded as more negative.



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