

Conversational catalysts to developing understanding of emotion regulation

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Mother-child conversation contributes to emotion understanding in young children

- mothers who use more emotion words and who discuss emotions more frequently and with greater elaboration have children with greater emotion understanding
(Brown & Dunn, 1996; Fivush, 1993; Laible, 2004; Raikes & Thompson, 2006)
- conversations highlighting the causes of emotion are especially associated with children's emotion understanding
(Dunn et al., 1991; Dunn & Brown, 1993; Ontai & Thompson, 2002)
- in secure attachments, mothers talk about emotion in a richer, more elaborative manner – and securely-attached children are more advanced in emotion understanding
(Laible, 2004; Laible & Thompson, 1998, 2000; Ontai & Thompson, 2002)
- these findings, many from prospective longitudinal studies, are consistent with other studies of the effects of parental discourse on developing psychological understanding

Does mother-child conversation also contribute to understanding of emotion regulation?

Emotion Coaching

Emotion coaching in the context of reminiscing

What emotion regulation strategies do mothers identify?

Which do they endorse?

How do young children perceive effective emotion regulation?

Emotion coaching in the context of emotionally-evocative situations

How do mothers interpret their children's emotional responses?

What predicts their emotional attributions?

Emotion coaching in the context of reminiscing . . .

Preschool Emotional Development Study

72 children (mean age 4½; 30 girls) and their mothers

During a single laboratory session, mothers and children conversed about two recent incidents in which the child had felt **mad** and **sad**. Mothers were encouraged to help children remember what happened, how they felt, and how they dealt with their feelings, and to continue the conversation until they thought it had reached a natural conclusion.

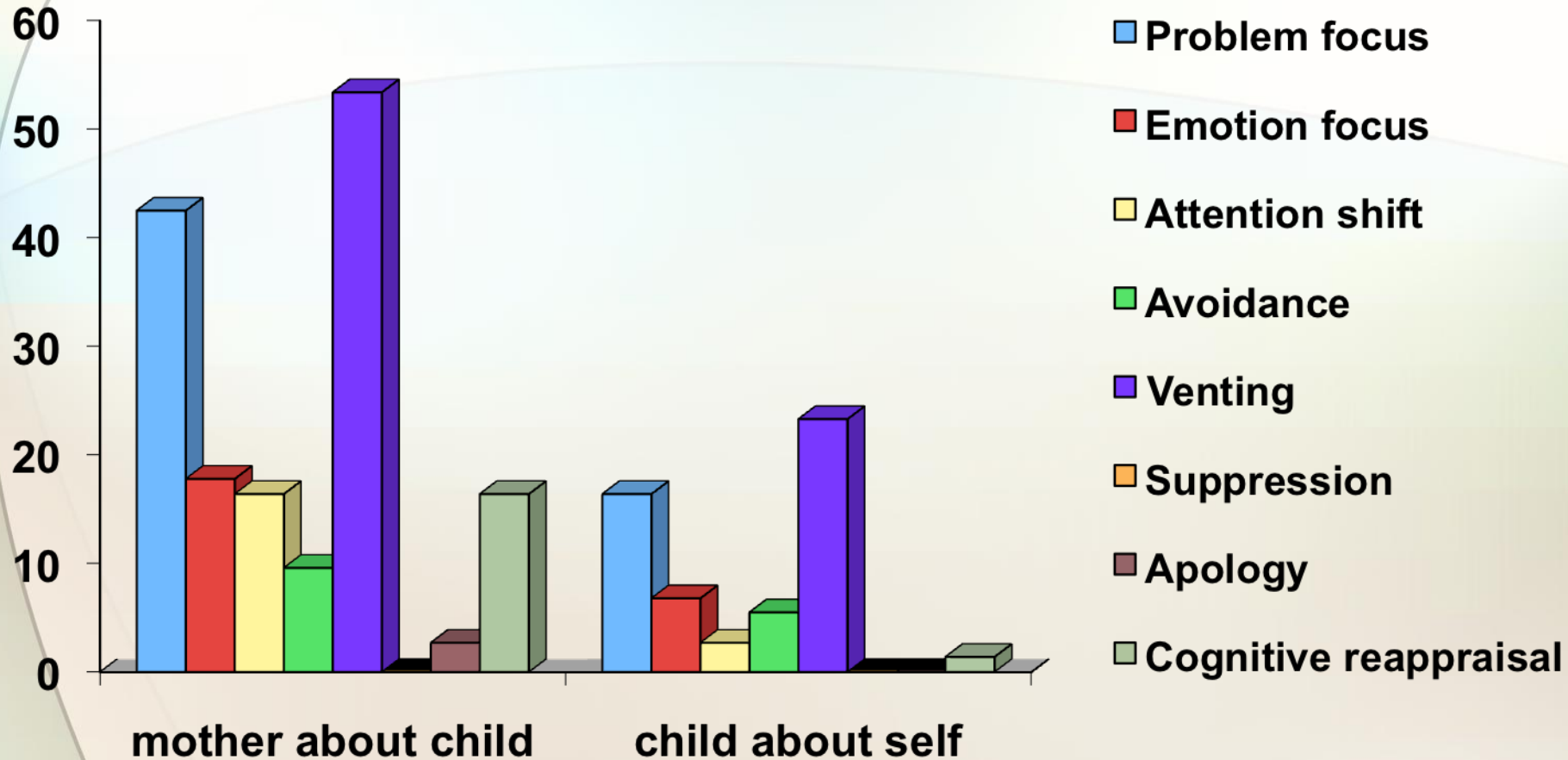
Conversations were videotaped and transcribed.

Emotion regulation strategies:

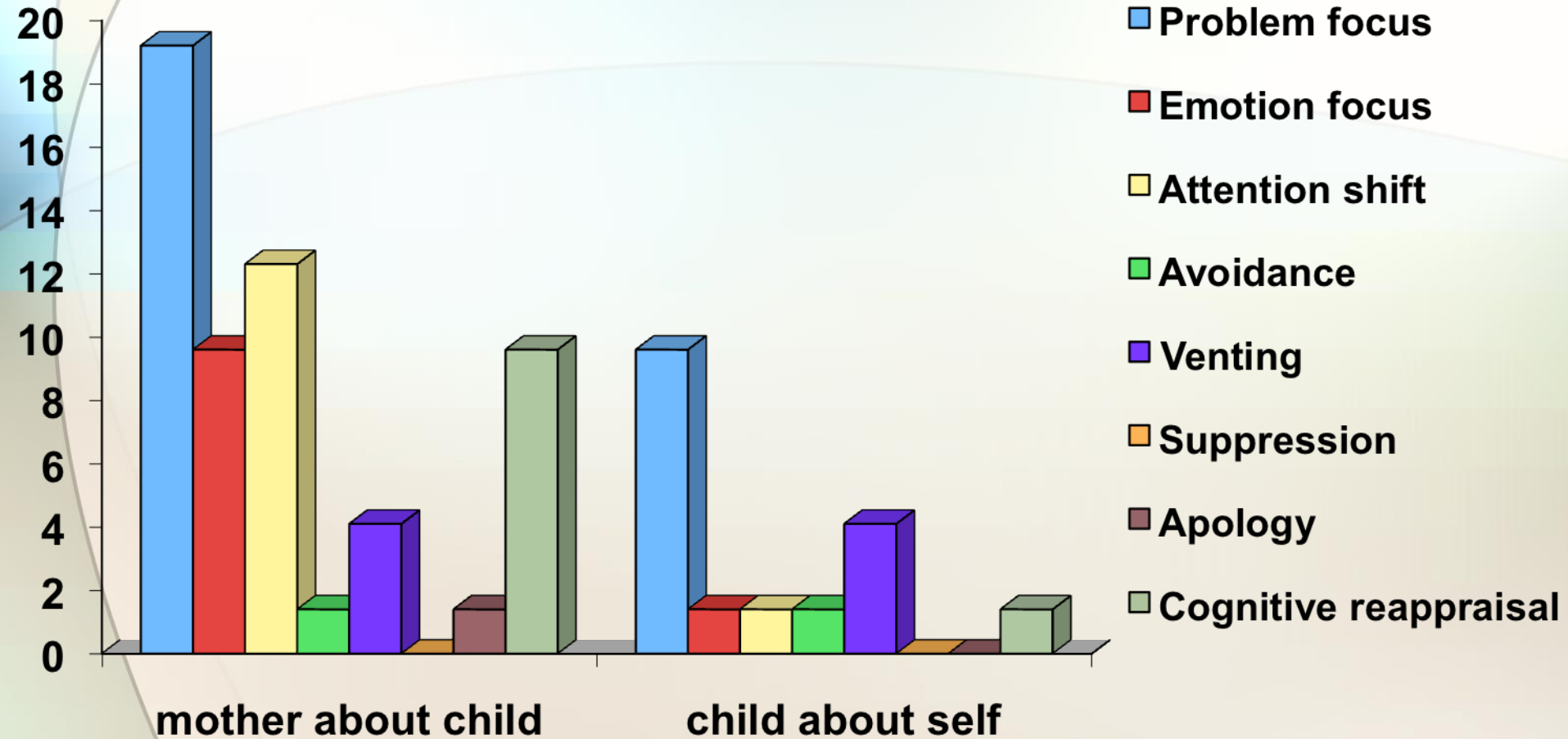
- Problem focused: Addresses the circumstances provoking emotion
- Emotion focused: Manages the feelings aroused by the situation
- Attention shifting: Efforts to distract from the emotion or situation
- Cognitive reappraisal: Refocusing on positive or constructive aspects of the situation
- Avoidance: Leaving the situation or stopping emotion provocations
- Venting: Behavioral or verbal expression of emotion
- Suppression: Efforts not to feel or to display emotion
- Apology: Making amends

In addition, we identified statements of **effectiveness**: when the speaker explicitly indicated that this strategy alleviated the situation or made it better

Emotion regulation strategies identified by mothers and preschoolers in emotional reminiscing



Effectiveness of emotion regulation strategies reported by mothers and children in emotion reminiscing



Emotion coaching in the context of emotionally-evocative situations . . .

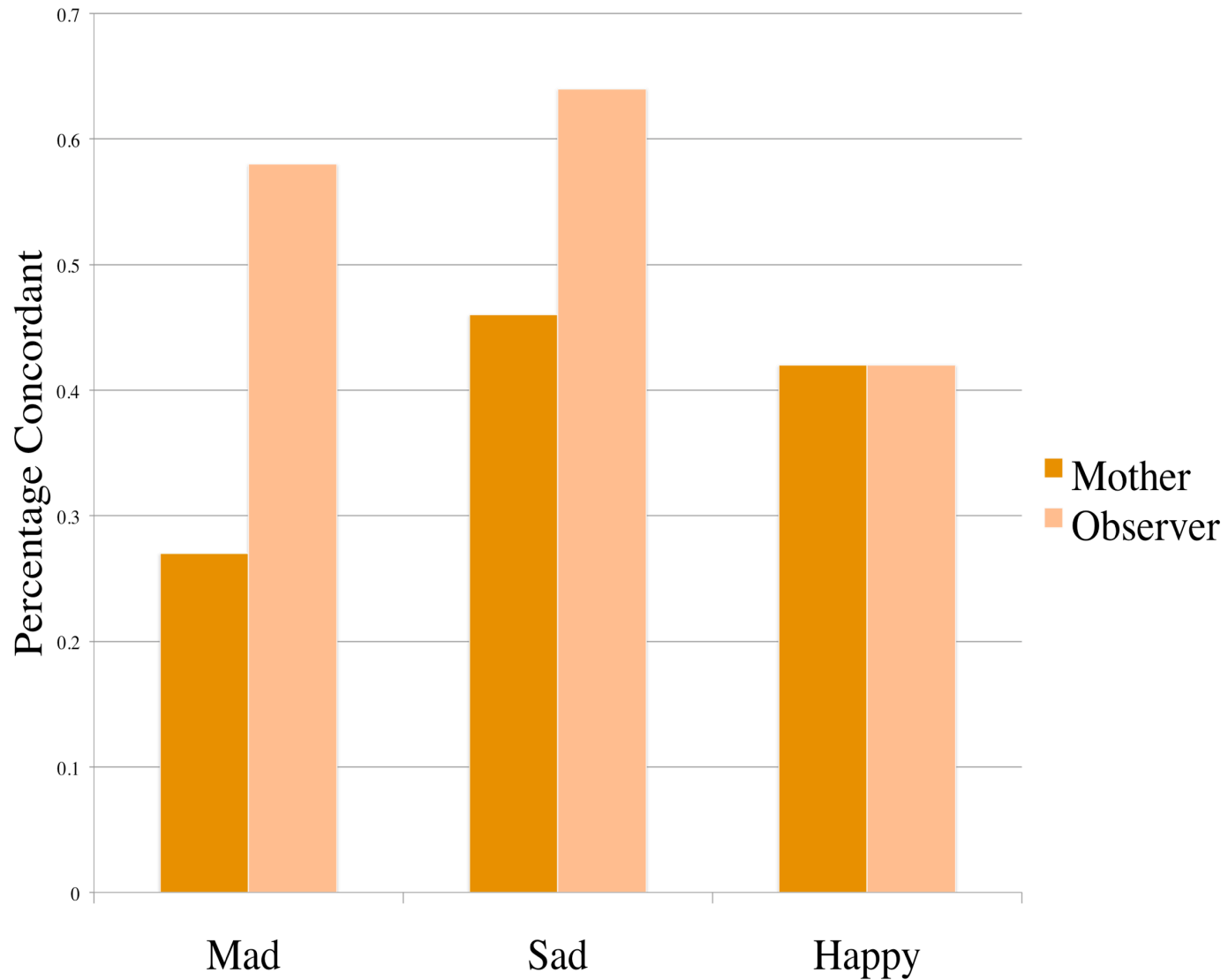
Preschool Emotional Development Study

72 children (mean age 4½; 30 girls) and their mothers

During a second laboratory visit, children and their mothers participated in an emotion regulation probe (denied request task). Later in the session, mothers and children were independently shown a videotape of the task and were interviewed about how the child felt during the probe, and why.

Later, well-trained research assistants coded children's behavioral, facial, and verbal expressions of emotion during the denied request task.

Child Emotion Attribution Concordance with Mothers and Observers



Predicting individual differences in mother-child concordance

- **Maternal emotion representations.** Mothers completed the *Trait Meta-Mood Scale* (Salovey et al, 1995) to assess mothers' attention to and acceptance of their own emotions. Subscales for *clarity* and *attention* were used.
- **Maternal depressive symptomatology.** The CES-D (Radloff, 1977) was used to assess mothers' report of recent depressive symptomatology.
- **Security of attachment.** The AQS (Waters & Deane, 1985) was used to assess attachment security.

Logistic Regression Analysis Predicting Mother-Child Concordance in Emotion Attributions

Variable	Odds ratios	95% CI
TMMS Attention	3.57 *	0.97 - 13.04
TMMS Clarity	1.17	0.35 - 3.88
CES-D Depression	1.04	0.96 - 1.14
Security of Attachment	87.20 *	2.70 - 2817.54

for model, $\chi^2 (4) = 12.50 *$

* $p < .05$

Final thoughts . . .

- Parental “emotion coaching” can occur in immediate situations requiring children’s emotion regulation or in reminiscing conversations; each has different challenges and opportunities.
- Mothers explicitly identify emotion regulatory strategies when reminiscing about recent emotional events and, more rarely, specifically endorse them. Children and mothers agree and disagree on how to “do” emotion regulation.
- We have also found that how mothers manage conversations about past negative emotions is important to reducing child avoidance and evasion; maternal validation and a secure attachment are important.
- In immediate contexts, mothers may not attribute emotion in a manner consistent with children’s self-attributions. Research is needed to clarify the consequences of misattributions.

