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FEELING AND UNDERSTANDING THROUGH THE PRISM OF RELATIONSHIPS

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Psychology has a long tradition of regarding emotion and cognition as separable and independent, perhaps even in conflict. This tradition has deep roots in ancient and modern Western philosophy and is most visibly manifested in psychology in the ideas of psychoanalytic theory. Freud and his followers devoted unique attention to the importance of emotions in thinking, motivation, and behavior, but they often portrayed emotions as irrational and maladaptive, especially as they functioned in unconscious processes. This psychoanalytic legacy remains influential today, even among scholars of different theoretical orientations, and helps to explain current interest in emotion regulation as a rational, adaptive mechanism to “tame” the impulses of raw emotion, especially through cognitive control.

The contributions to this volume reflect how far psychologists have come in recognizing the intimate connections between emotion and cognition throughout development. Beginning with the young infant’s emerging capacity to accurately interpret facial expressions of emotion and with the baby’s emotional response to expectations of the caregiver’s behavior, it is

apparent that cognitive growth and emotional development are mutually influential. Emotion–cognition interrelationships are further evident in the emergence of social referencing, the growth of emotion understanding, the development of self-referential emotions, the emergence of empathy, joint humor, and other forms of shared emotionality, and the variety of influences contributing to the development of emotion self-regulation (see reviews by Saarni, Campos, Camras, & Witherington, 2006; Thompson, 2006a). Research in these areas has also contributed to a change in prevalent portrayals of the influence of emotion in development. Rather than being viewed merely as a primitive, irrational force that must be managed to permit socialized conduct, emotion is increasingly regarded as a biologically adaptive, constructive influence on children’s developing social transactions, self-awareness, interpersonal sensitivity—and thinking.

Contemporary psychologists have not entirely abandoned their traditional approaches to emotion, however, and in one important respect they should not. The psychoanalytic emphasis on the influence of early, close relationships on emotional growth and understanding can be a significant contribution to contemporary thinking about cognition–emotion interrelationships. The Freudian view—expanded by Rene Spitz, Margaret Mahler, Erik Erikson, and many others—that young children perceive their own emotions and those of others through the prism of how caregivers nurture, evaluate, communicate about, and otherwise respond to their feelings offers a potentially valuable window into how emotion representations are colored by early relational experience. It is a view that has been more recently advanced by the contemporary inheritors of the developmental psychoanalytic legacy, attachment theorists.

This chapter is devoted to examining and advancing the contributions of attachment theory to contemporary research on the developmental association of emotion and cognition. Through its emphasis on broad and narrow features of relational experience that influence the growth of representations of the self and others, attachment theory offers provocative ideas about how young children represent and interpret emotional experience. What is particularly important about the contemporary climate of developmental research, however, is how the ideas of attachment theorists intersect with those of others who study developing representations of psychological experience from alternative theoretical approaches. One of my purposes, therefore, is to show how the formulations of attachment theory can be elucidated and clarified by contemporary research on young children’s conceptual growth while also providing important insights into the relational construction of early emotional understanding. I profile relevant research from my own laboratory group and others, and I also offer suggestions for future research directions concerning the developmental interaction of emotional experience, representation, and relationships.

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INTERNAL WORKING MODELS AND COGNITION-EMOTION INTERACTION

Drawing from their psychoanalytic forebears, attachment theorists believe that early caregiving experience is important to psychological development for several reasons (Ainsworth, 1973; Bowlby, 1969/1982; see also Thompson, 2006a). The caregiver's sensitivity provides a foundation for a secure or insecure relationship with the caregiver that, in turn, fosters other developing competencies through the effects of security on exploratory play, social skills, and self-confidence. As a rudimentary index of the early harmony of the relationship between parent and child, moreover, security of attachment is an avenue by which other socialization processes occur, including the child's acceptance of the adult's guidance, identification with the parent and internalization of the parent's values, and other benefits of a mutually responsive relationship (Maccoby, 1984; Waters, Kondo-Ikemura, Posada, & Richters, 1991).

Internal Working Models

The most provocative explanation for the influence of security of attachment on psychological growth is through the mental representations of people and relationships that are believed to be inspired by attachment relationships. According to attachment theorists, these mental representations—known as *internal working models* (IWMs)—influence how infants conceptualize their caregivers, their attachment relationships, and themselves. IWMs begin with the simple affective-perceptual schemas and rudimentary social expectations that enable infants to forecast the immediate behavior of their attachment figures. In the months and years that follow, these IWMs are thought to develop into broader dynamic representational systems that, among other things, provide guidance about how to interact with others, expectations for close relationships, and self-perceptions that influence other developing belief systems (see Bretherton & Munholland, 1999). As a consequence, IWMs constitute interpretive filters through which children and adults organize their understanding of new experiences and relationships in ways that are consistent with past experiences and expectations. IWMs influence, for example, how people choose new partners and interact with them in ways that are based on, and thus help to confirm, the biases created from earlier attachment relationships. In a sense, attachment security contributes to the development of affective-cognitive representations that influence how young children feel and think about themselves and the social world.

Such a view is consistent with the findings of other research literatures. Studies of the development of early social expectations (Lamb & Lewis, 2005) indicate, for example, that young infants develop salient expectations that

affect their responsiveness to caregivers. Research on the development of episodic memory (Hudson, 1993) and autobiographical memory (Nelson & Fivush, 2004) indicates that relational processes influence how young children construct memories of events of personal significance.

Research based on script theory (describing the development of generalized event representations) shows that young children develop hierarchically organized representations of familiar experiences that vary (and change developmentally) in their generalization across contexts and people (Fivush, 2006). Studies of social information-processing biases (Lemerise & Arsenio, 2000) show the influence of attribution biases and other expectations on peer behavior, although the origins of these biases are not well understood. Much more research is needed on the association of these and other representational processes with early relational influences as suggested by attachment theory. The potential contribution of the IWM concept is that it offers a portrayal of developing mental representations that is integrative, affectively colored, and relationally based. The problem with the IWM concept, however, is its inclusiveness and vague definition. Critics from within and outside attachment theory have noted, for example, that as it is presently conceptualized, the concept of IWMs can be flexibly enlisted to explain the association between attachment security and a vast array of correlates because the defining features, development, and sequelae of IWMs are not well defined by attachment theorists (Belsky & Cassidy, 1994; Thompson & Raikes, 2003b). This is because the IWM is, in Bowlby's (1973) theory, a conceptual metaphor, not a well-articulated theoretical construct.

Despite this, an expanding research literature documents the association between the security of attachment and a broad variety of social-cognitive outcomes that are consistent with theoretical portrayals of a security-based network of mental representations like the IWM. Secure children are not only more socially competent with friends and exhibit more positive personality qualities, they are also more advanced in emotion understanding, exhibit more positive expectations for peer behavior, show greater compliance, cooperation, and other indicators of emergent conscience, have a more positive self-concept, and exhibit enhanced emotion regulation when compared with insecurely attached children (see reviews by Thompson, 2006a, 2008). In a recent report from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Study of Early Child Care, Raikes and Thompson (2008a) found that the security of attachment at 24 and 36 months predicted social-cognitive abilities at 54 months and first grade, even with measures of maternal sensitivity controlled. Securely attached children were more likely to identify socially competent and relevant solutions to social problem-solving tasks, were less likely to make negative motivational attributions to peers, and were less lonely than insecurely attached children.

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Constructing Mental Working Models

It seems apparent that attachment security is relevant not only to developing behavioral tendencies but also to how young children think about themselves and the social world. In what ways, therefore, could the security of attachment lead to these kinds of mental representations of relationships, self, and other people? Attachment theorists have proposed that, in addition to the positive social expectations and self-esteem fostered by sensitive care, the content and quality of parent-child discourse may also influence young children's developing social and emotional representations. According to Bretherton (1993), for example, parents and children in secure relationships are likely to engage in more candid, open, and fluid communication that enables greater personal disclosure, particularly of disturbing experiences or negative emotions that are troubling or confusing to young children. When this occurs, security is fostered not only by the parent's behavioral responsiveness but also by his or her understanding and reassurance conveyed in conversation. By contrast, when parents are critical or dismissive of the fears or anxieties of their young children, emotional communication is impaired and reassurance may not be forthcoming. Children may come to believe that their own negative emotions are less manageable, more overwhelming, and less comprehensible compared with children in secure attachments.

Parent-child conversations—whether about disturbing experiences or ordinary daily events—are also likely to contribute to young children's understanding of the behavior of other people as parents clarify others' feelings, motives, goals, expectations, and other psychological influences. These mentalistic and motivational explanations in discussions of shared experiences are almost inevitable as adults interpret the social behavior they observe in light of their own psychological inferences and judgments. In parent-child conversation, therefore, young children are likely to achieve insight into the features of social and emotional understanding, as well as self-awareness, that have been associated with attachment security (see also Thompson, 2000, 2006a).

This view is consistent with research literatures describing the significance of parent-child discourse for early conceptual growth (see Thompson, 2006b; Wareham & Salmon, 2006). Discourse about mental states in the context of shared social activity is, along with the young child's inductive inferences, an important influence on developing theory of mind and other aspects of psychological understanding (Astington & Baird, 2005; Carpendale & Lewis, 2004). Emotion understanding is associated with how often parents discuss feelings with their children and the elaborativeness of their conversational prompts (Dunn, 2002). The content and richness of parent-child conversation influence event representation and episodic memory (Ornstein, Haden, & Hedrick, 2004), the quality of autobiographical memory (Nelson

& Fivush, 2004), and even young children's anticipatory event representations (Hudson, 2002). These conclusions are consistent with the view that young children rely on the claims of the adults they trust on a wide variety of issues of importance to them, especially on matters that they cannot independently confirm (Harris, 2007). Young children have an early and intense interest in understanding the thoughts, feelings, and intentions of others, but because these are invisible and often confusing mental states, they would naturally rely on what they learn from conversations with parents.

There is also evidence that parents in secure relationships talk differently with their young children about these psychological phenomena compared with parents who have insecurely attached children. Although evidence is limited, a number of studies have shown that the mothers of secure children are more elaborative and evaluative in their style of conversation with their offspring (for a review, see Reese, 2002). An elaborative style elicits relatively detailed conversations about the child's experiences, typically because mothers ask more open-ended who-what-when-where-why questions, expand on their young child's contributions to the conversation, ask follow-up questions, and provide evaluations of the child's responses that may confirm or correct what the child has said. Studies of event representation and autobiographical memory have found elaborative discourse by mothers to be important because it contributes to richer, more detailed representations of and deeper memory for events by young children (Hudson, 1993, 2002; Nelson & Fivush, 2004).

Although little is known about why some mothers speak in a more elaborative, evaluative manner with their young offspring, one recent study found that mothers who are more secure in their attachment representations spoke more elaboratively with their preschoolers when reminiscing about past events than did nonsecure mothers (Reese, 2007). Another study found that secure mothers provided more frequent references to emotion in their reminiscing about shared experiences (Bost et al., 2006). It is possible that their own security provides mothers with more confidence to explore the diverse features of personal experiences, including both positive and negative aspects of those experiences. In so doing, they may also be contributing to greater depth and richness in the psychological representations (or IWMs) of their young children.

Taken together, attachment research has suggested that the multifaceted relational experiences associated with a secure attachment contribute to more constructive behavioral tendencies and more positive representations of others and the self. These representations emerge because the parental sensitivity that initially led to a secure attachment is likely to be maintained in styles of parent-child conversation that provide support, reassurance, and enhanced understanding of the psychological processes underlying interpersonal interaction. This conjecture is supported not only by attachment research but also by other research literatures that have described how the

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content and quality of discourse influences the growth of young children's representations of the social world, understanding of self, and constructive memory (see also chap. 4, this volume). It may also be true that parent-child conversations help young children to derive the implicit rules for getting along with others and broader expectations for the characteristics of people that are also incorporated into the IWM concept, but much more research on these issues is needed. In a manner that is consistent with attachment formulations and also with neo-Vygotskian perspectives (e.g., Rogoff, 1990) and sociocultural cognitive developmental formulations (Nelson, 1996), parent-child conversational discourse may be a foundational relational influence on children's developing capacities for representing the inner psychological experience that they share with other human beings. In this manner, relational experience bridges emotional growth and the cognitive representations of emotion and other facets of psychological understanding.

As this research review indicates, however, much more remains to be learned. What are the characteristics of elaborative discourse, and does it contribute to emotional understanding as it does to event representation and autobiographical memory? How do the security of attachment and the quality of parent-child conversation jointly contribute to young children's developing understanding of themselves and the psychological world? What other influences on the parent-child relationship might also be influential? If it is not only what is said but also who says it that influences the development of psychological understanding, how does this inform understanding of the development of children's emotion understanding?

DEVELOPING MENTAL MODELS OF EMOTION THROUGH SOCIAL INTERACTION

My colleagues and I became interested in these questions in our efforts to understand how attachment security contributes to young children's social competence with peers and other close partners. We sought to explore the hypothesis that a secure attachment contributes to enhanced emotion understanding of others, which can facilitate social competence. This would be consistent with the general formulations of a security-based IWM, but this approach would enable us to study the functioning of IWMs in a more specific, refined manner.

We used two measures of emotion understanding with a sample of 4-year-olds (Laible & Thompson, 1998). The first measure was adapted from a procedure by Fabes, Eisenberg, McCormick, and Wilson (1988) in which research assistants at the child's preschool or child care program watched for spontaneous emotional outbursts from any other child that could be observed by the target child. After noting the emotion and its cause, the assistant then approached the target child to ask what the other child was feeling, and why, and the accuracy of the response was later coded on the basis of the concor-

dance of the child's response with the research assistant's observation of the situation.

The second measure was an affective perspective-taking task developed by Denham (1986) in which children were presented with short stories enacted by a research assistant using puppets and narration. At the conclusion of each story, the children were asked to show how the story character felt at the conclusion by attaching to the puppet a felt face that the child had earlier identified as representing a sad, happy, angry, or fearful emotion. Nearly half the stories that children heard described emotional responses that were different from those the child would experience in the same situation, according to maternal report (e.g., feeling excited rather than frightened at the approach of a large dog), and these stories are typically more challenging for young children. Summary scores for these two measures of emotion understanding were highly correlated, contributing to the validity of each, so they were combined for further analysis.

Securely attached children scored higher on this composite measure of emotion understanding than did insecurely attached children. They were also higher on the portion of the first measure that specifically assessed children's understanding of the causes of their peers' emotions in child care or preschool settings. Of particular interest was that the conceptual advantage of secure children was in understanding negative emotions. When scores for each measure were decomposed to distinguish responses to positive and negative emotion-eliciting circumstances, securely attached children scored higher on the index of negative emotion understanding, but there were no differences on the derived index of positive emotion understanding. Their relatively greater proficiency in understanding and explaining the causes of others' negative feelings is consistent with theoretical portrayals of the benefits of a secure attachment to emotion understanding (Bretherton, 1993).

The greater proficiency in emotion understanding by secure children has been replicated in our lab (Ontai & Thompson, 2002; Raikes & Thompson, 2006) and by others (Steele, Steele, Croft, & Fonagy, 1999). Moreover, Denham, Blair, Schmidt, and DeMulder (2002) showed how, in a preschool sample, the security of attachment was predictive of later social competence through the effects of security on enhanced emotional competence. Although more research is needed, it appears that the relational experiences associated with a secure attachment enhance young children's understanding of others' emotions—especially their negative emotions—in ways that may be relevant to their capacities for social interaction.

Parent-Child Conversation and Developing Emotion Understanding

What relational experiences associated with a secure attachment enhance emotion understanding? In particular, does the quality of mother-child conversation foster comprehension of others' feelings?

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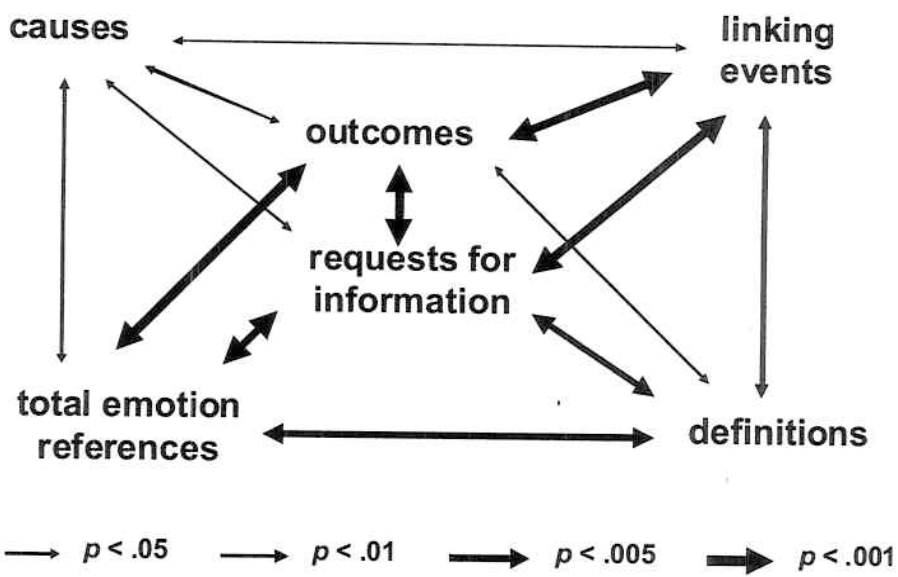


Figure 5.1. Correlational associations between maternal discourse variables. From "Early Understanding of Emotion, Morality, and the Self: Developing a Working Model," by R. A. Thompson, D. Laible, and L. Ontai, in *Advances in Child Development and Behavior* (Vol. 31, p. 156), by R. V. Kail (Ed.), 2003, San Diego, CA: Academic Press. Copyright 2003 by Elsevier. Reprinted with permission.

These questions guided our follow-up study (Ontai & Thompson, 2002). We observed a sample of 3-year-olds with their mothers as they conversed about emotion-relevant topics, and we also assessed the security of attachment. Two mother-child conversation tasks were used. First, we asked mothers to recall with the child a recent event in which the child had displayed negative emotion. We focused on negative emotional experiences because of the findings of the preceding study and theoretical expectations that securely attached children would exhibit better comprehension of negative feelings. Second, we asked mothers to talk with their children about a series of one-page pictorial stories involving emotional themes (e.g., a girl is afraid about her first day in a new class). We chose this storytelling format because the minimal narrative structure would, we thought, better exhibit mothers' preferences for discussing emotions with their offspring.

From these transcribed mother-child conversations about emotion, we coded many 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. We found that these elements of maternal emotion-related discourse were highly interrelated, as depicted in the correlational associations presented in Figure 5.1.

We also used a global rating of the mother's overall *elaborative* conversational style and found that each of the discourse features in Figure 5.1 was significantly associated with elaborative style. These findings suggest that there is a strong network of interrelated features of maternal emotion-related discourse associated with elaborative speech that is likely to be provocative of children's developing emotion understanding. This is consistent with the richness and detail of the parent-child conversations in which mothers are elaborative in their conversational prompts.

Two years later, these children returned to the lab with their mothers. In addition to being assessed for the security of attachment, children responded to the Denham affective perspective-taking task as in the earlier study. We found, as we had before, that a secure attachment at age 5 was associated with higher scores on emotion understanding, particularly of negative emotions, even controlling for attachment at age 3. With respect to the measures at age 3, we discovered that the security of attachment interacted with the quality of mother-child conversation in predicting emotion understanding 2 years later. More specifically, securely attached children whose mothers had used a more elaborative style of discourse at age 3 were more advanced in their understanding of positive emotions at age 5.

These findings were the first to indicate that early elaborative conversations with attachment figures are provocative not only of better event representation and autobiographical memory but also of emotion understanding, especially for securely attached children. They were not, however, the last; Laible (2004) found that emotion understanding in 4-year-olds was significantly predicted by both attachment security and the mother's use of elaborative discourse and discussion of emotion in the context of reminiscing about events in the recent past. In an independent sample, Laible and Song (2006) found that maternal elaboration in reminiscing predicted preschoolers' emotion understanding. These findings are important for characterizing the elements of mother-child conversation that are important to developing emotion understanding in young children. Beyond the frequency of emotion references in maternal speech, in other words, it is the overall discourse context of these references that is important: specifically, elaborative and evaluative speech that unfolds emotion incidents within a broader explanatory context by posing questions about emotion causes and outcomes, linking events to the child's experience, defining emotional terms, and soliciting information from the child about emotion concepts. In this manner, emotion and cognition are both fostered by the quality of conversations young children share with their caregivers.

The understanding fostered by this style of maternal discourse extends beyond comprehension of emotion. Laible and Thompson (2000) found that maternal references to feelings in conversations about the recent past predicted 4-year-olds' conscience development: More frequent maternal descriptions of emotions were associated with greater behavioral cooperation and

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compliance. In a prospective study, furthermore, Laible and Thompson (2002) found that maternal references to feelings during conflict episodes with children at age 2½ predicted children's conscience at age 3. In neither study did maternal references to rules and the consequences of breaking them predict children's conscience development. Taken together, these findings suggest that one of the consequences of maternal elaborative discussion of feelings is that it sensitizes preschoolers to others' needs and to the human consequences of wrongdoing. This portrayal of the humanistic origins of an early moral consciousness is in stark contrast to the punishment-and-obedience portrayal of young children in classic Kohlbergian theory, and it suggests that the conceptual catalysts of mother-child conversation extend beyond emotion understanding to other dimensions of social competence and psychological understanding.

Constructing Understanding in Challenging Circumstances

In middle-class families, discussion of emotion might focus on relatively benign encounters with mean siblings or scraped knees. In families at sociodemographic risk, the circumstances in which young children experience and observe emotion can be much less benign and might include domestic violence, a depressed caregiver, or threats to the child. Our next study focused on the development of emotion understanding in young children from at-risk families because the relational influences on emotional growth, as well as their impact on children's representations of emotion, are likely to be more complex and challenging.

The sample was recruited from Early Head Start, an early intervention program designed to provide family support and promote child development among families living in poverty (see Raikes & Thompson, 2006, 2008b, for further details and related analyses). When children were age 2, 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. A year later, children completed Denham's affective perspective-taking task for assessing emotion understanding, and mothers and children were observed discussing recent events when the child felt happy, angry, or sad. From transcriptions of their conversations, we counted the frequency of mothers' references to emotion. We also included two measures of the child's emotion language as an index of developing emotion knowledge: 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.

A series of regression analyses revealed both direct and indirect effects of broad family and relational influences at age 2—attachment security, maternal depression, and emotional risks—on maternal and child emotion lan-

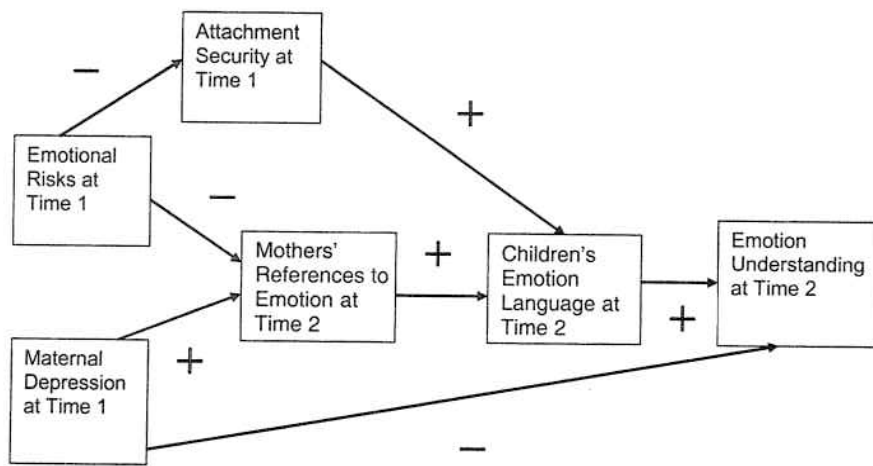


Figure 5.2. Relations between family emotional climate, attachment security, mothers' references to emotion, child emotion language, and child emotion understanding.

guage in relation to children's emotion understanding at age 3 (see Figure 5.2). Maternal depressive symptomatology and family emotional risks were each negatively associated with children's emotion understanding, but in different ways. Mothers who reported greater emotional risks within the family when children were 2 were less likely to talk about emotions when reminiscing with children at age 3. Emotional experiences were, for these mothers, perhaps troubling matters that restricted conversational access with their offspring. Mothers' diminished emotion language was associated, in turn, with children's diminished emotion language that, in turn, predicted poorer emotion understanding.

Maternal depression when children were age 2 was positively associated with mothers' conversational references to emotion at age 3. Depressed mothers may have been more attuned to emotion in themselves and others. Depression also, however, had a direct and unmediated negative prediction of children's emotion understanding at age 3. In this respect, depressive symptomatology seems to have also colored the emotional climate of the mother-child relationship such that children's emotion understanding at the follow-up assessment was lower, perhaps owing to the confused and confusing affective behavior of the caregiver in the hopelessness, self-critical attributions, and hostile behavior characteristic of depressed individuals. It is important that where maternal depression was concerned, the mother's more frequent references to emotion in parent-child conversation do not seem to have enhanced emotion understanding because of the different relational context in which they occurred.

Finally, as other studies have found, a secure attachment was positively predictive of emotion understanding at age 3. However, in this study of an

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at-risk group, the effects of attachment were not direct but, rather, were mediated by children's emotion language in conversation with their mothers. This raises the intriguing possibility that the benefits of attachment security are in how it enables children more readily to reflect on and identify 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). Elucidating specifically how a secure attachment promotes emotion understanding in light of these findings is thus an important future research goal.

Taken together, the findings of this study with an at-risk sample of families confirm both the importance of mother-child conversation to the development of emotion understanding and the broader relational context in which such conversation occurs. Whereas the development of emotion understanding is enhanced when caregivers talk more about people's feelings in middle-class homes, mothers' references to emotion in at-risk families are affected by the emotional climate of the home and, when mothers are depressed, their conversational references to emotion are not associated with greater emotion understanding of offspring. Attachment security—another relational influence—has a positive influence on developing emotion understanding primarily through its effects on children's greater facility with emotion language in parent-child conversation. In this constellation of catalysts to emotion understanding, the emotional climate of the parent-child relationship shapes the influence of conversation on developing emotion understanding.

CONCLUSION

Children's developing representations of emotional experience are among the more significant forms of emotion-cognition interaction. As important as their maturing conceptual skills are, it is becoming increasingly clear that young children also benefit from learning about emotion through conversations with adults. Such conversational catalysts not only provide children with insight into psychological experience but also embed developing emotional understanding in a relational context. In viewing the development of feeling and understanding through a relational prism, it is important not only *what* is said about emotion but also by *whom* and the *quality of the relationship* in which conversation occurs.

This is the idea behind attachment theorists' concept of the "internal working models" that guide understanding of people, relationships, and self from the perspective of the security or insecurity of attachment relationships. Accumulating research evidence on the social-cognitive correlates of attachment security is consistent with this idea of security-based mental representations, and the IWM concept is enlivened and specified by allied re-

search in other conceptual domains, such as social expectations, event representation, social information-processing biases, autobiographical memory, and social scripts. Because IWMs are built on these conceptual constituents related to the encoding, interpretation, and retention of social information, the allied research literatures provide conceptual and methodological tools for elucidating the development and functioning of IWMs within the context of secure and insecure relationships and the broader emotional climate of the home.

Our research has provided one example of how to study security-related IWMs in the context of research on emotion understanding, conscience, and (in other research in our lab) self-awareness, emotion regulation, and other well-defined developmental processes that are elements of IWMs. This research has shown that the content and quality of mother-child conversational discourse are important influences on developing representations of emotion in self and others, that secure and insecure parent-child relationships are characterized by different styles of discourse that are related to developing emotion understanding in young children, and that security interacts with the conversational quality in shaping emotion knowledge. Beyond this, it is also clear that, especially for families in sociodemographic stress, other features of the emotional climate of the home influence the quality of mother-child conversation in ways directly relevant to the development of emotion representations.

This work is the beginning of a productive exploration of children's appropriation of social understanding from the conceptual catalysts of interaction in close relationships. Young children's developing representations of other people are also likely to be affected, for example, by how others' motives and intentions are characterized by caregivers in constructive ways or in a manner likely to inspire greater avoidance or suspicion. As parents convey implicit judgments of admirable or inappropriate conduct, coach offspring in emotion regulation, or explain the reasons for conflict and how to avoid it, they shape the implicit decision rules for relationships and expectations for others that children take with them into new social interactions. As we begin to better understand these relational influences from within and outside the formulations of attachment theory, it becomes possible to better comprehend the social construction of understanding and the relational influences that are central to it.

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