Preschoolers' emotional regulation in a clean-up task: An observational study

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1) Abstract
- Emotional regulation consists of the "emotional and intrinsically processing responsible for monitoring, evaluating, and modifying emotional reactions to accomplish one’s goals." (Thompson, 1994).
- The current study was designed to expand the literature on early emotional regulation by examining children's and parents' strategies in a frustrating situation as a function of the child's sex, the parent's sex, and the child's age. The sample consists of 85 preschooers and both of their parents. Videotaped mother- and father-child interactions were coded and analyzed. The results show that boys use more aggressive opposition, whining and negotiation than girls. Younger children use more passive opposition, whining and less division than their older counterparts. There was no differences in parents' strategies in function of their child's sex, child's age and parent's sex.

2) Introduction
- Emotional regulation can be defined as the "emotional and intrinsically processing responsible for monitoring, evaluating, and modifying emotional reactions to accomplish one's goals." (Thompson, 1994). In this study, emotional regulation consists of preschoolers' reactions in a frustrating situation (toy clean-up).
- Emotion regulation has been linked with the development of social competence (Haberstock, Denham & Dunn, 2001) and with developmental trajectories (e.g. (Barrett & Cicchetti, 1997; Cicchetti & Lippman, 1980)). Some studies suggest that some forms of noncompliance (e.g. aggression, diversions) are more mature and that those behaviors increase with age in the preschool years (Klima-Dougan & Kopp, 1995). Power, McGraw, Hughes & Manire, 1994). Unskilled noncompliance (e.g. aggression) has been linked to later rating of problems. Some authors found a positive longitudinal link between mother use of regulation strategies at 30 months of age and child emotional regulation at 5 years of age.

Children behaviors
- Aggressive opposition: The child emits intense opposition behaviors and directs his anger at an individual or environment (e.g. knocks the ground, throws toys, hits the parent, yells, tamper tantrum).
- Passive opposition: The child emits denial behavior (e.g. continues playing ignoring the parent).
- Whining: The child expresses sadness or distress (e.g. crying, sulking).
- Controlling parent behavior: The child tries to exert a direct and intrusive control on the parent (e.g. pulls the toys out of the parent's hands, tells the parent to stop).

Parents strategies
- Action strategies: The parent gives clear indications and guides the child (e.g. asks for help, shares the task, tells the child where the toys must be placed, tells the child he's not done).
- Affection strategies: The parent acts on the frustrating potential of the situation to help the child manage his emotions (e.g. explaining the reasoning of the task, verbalizes child's emotion you're enjoying playing with this toy, right?).
- Reinforcement strategies: The parent encourages the child (e.g. "OK, let's go, you're doing great").
- Authoritarian strategies: The parent uses coercive behaviors (e.g. menacing, gives orders, tells the child he's not nice).
- Intrusive strategies: The parent physically constrains the child to do the task (e.g. takes the toys from the child).

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category (DN)</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>AB</th>
<th>AC</th>
<th>BC</th>
<th>ABC</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Passive opposition</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
<td>4.78*</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
<td>7.10*</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
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Table 3

McNemar and Pearson's chi-square for parent and child behavior (categorical variables)

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<th>Category (DN)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Aggressive opposition Parent's sex McNemar n.s. CHILD's sex (with mother) Pearson's chi-square X²(1) = 6.64* CHILD's sex (with father) Pearson's chi-square X²(1) = 3.62* CHILD's age (with mother) Pearson's chi-square X²(1) = 2.34* CHILD's age (with father) Pearson's chi-square X²(1) = 4.55*</td>
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<td>Whining Parent's sex McNemar n.s. CHILD's sex (with mother) Pearson's chi-square X²(1) = 7.23* CHILD's sex (with father) Pearson's chi-square X²(1) = 6.23* CHILD's age (with mother) Pearson's chi-square X²(1) = 2.52* CHILD's age (with father) Pearson's chi-square X²(1) = 0.23*</td>
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<td>Controlling parent behavior Parent's sex McNemar n.s. CHILD's sex (with mother) Pearson's chi-square X²(1) = 5.62* CHILD's sex (with father) Pearson's chi-square X²(1) = 3.80*</td>
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5) Results
- Globally, our results suggest that:
  - For the children, the strategies most frequently used are: diversification, active opposition and passive opposition.
  - For the parents, the strategies most frequently used are: action strategies and reinforcement strategies.
  - Boys use more aggressive opposition and whining and negotiation. For whining and negotiation, the differences are significant only with the mother.
  - Older children use more diverse and less passive opposition and whining than younger children. For whining the difference was significant only with the father.
  - The use of intrusive control was higher with older children with their mother but higher with younger children with their father.

6) Discussion and conclusion
- As expected, we found more aggressive opposition with boys than girls, but also more whining and negotiation strategies.
- We observed changes in children's strategies with age. Some mature strategies (diversification) increase with age and some of the immature strategies (diversification) decrease (whining, passive opposition) with age. The use of negotiation strategies didn't increase as in Klima-Dougan & Kopp (1999), but it is possibly due to the fact that our sample is an older one.
- We found no evidence of difference in function of parent's or child's strategies.

Advantages
- The presence of both parents
- The use of observational data in natural setting
- The families in our sample are more educated than the norm.