MATERNAL SOCIALIZATION OF TODDLER DISTRESS AS A FUNCTION OF MARITAL QUALITY AND DYADIC VERSUS TRIADIC INTERACTIONS

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
Graduate Department of Human Development and Applied Psychology
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

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MATERNAL SOCIALIZATION OF TODDLER NEGATIVE EMOTION
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TRIADIC INTERACTIONS

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ABSTRACT

This study attempts to investigate the relationship among marital satisfaction, parenting and socialization of emotion. Maternal socialization of toddlers' negative emotion was observed as a function of marital quality and dyadic versus triadic interactions. Toddlers were observed with their parents interacting around a frustration eliciting task. The dyadic and triadic interactions were counterbalanced for order and videotaped. An independent rater coded maternal socialization responses as instances of goal talk, reason/structure, redirect attention and rated mothers on goal alignment. Marital quality and dyad/triad were found to be related to the amount of reasoning and structure provided to the toddlers. Results indicated overall that the relationship context made a difference not only to what the toddlers received, but to the amount of distress that they exhibited.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION

Theoretically and empirically, it has been argued that quality of marriage affects quality of parenting which also affects child development (Belsky 1984, 1981; Goldberg & Easterbrooks, 1984; Parke, 1979). In fact, the quality of the marital relationship has been demonstrated to be predictive of problems in child adjustment, placing children at risk for psychopathology (Grych, Seid & Fincham, 1992; Jouriles, Murphy & O'Leary, 1989). However, the mechanisms by which marital quality affect parenting and child development are not known (Grych & Fincham, 1990). Erel & Burman (1995), in a meta-analysis examining only studies of highest methodological quality, found support for the hypothesis that the negative affect in the marital relationship spills over into the parent-child relationship (Engfer, 1988). The meta analysis results also indicate that previously considered potential moderators of the linkage between the marital and parent-child relationship, such as birth order, sex of parent, sex of child, and sex of parent and child, are not found to have a moderating effect. This indicates a significant and positive relationship between the quality of the marital relationship and the quality of the parent-child relationship: a more unitary and global link than previously thought.

Considerable research also indicates that there is a strong relationship between marital conflict and parenting (Erel & Burman, 1995; Grych & Fincham, 1990; Jouriles, Murphy & O'Leary, 1989). A possible mechanism is through the spillover of negative affect generated by marital conflict into the parenting relationship (Engfer, 1988). This hypothesis suggests that parents experiencing marital discord use less optimal parenting techniques and also provide inconsistent discipline. When one is under marital stress, one
is less likely to be as emotionally available to sensitively monitor and respond to a child's needs and desires (Emde & Easterbrooks, 1985). This study will be exploring directly how marital quality influences socialization efforts.

Traditionally, studies of infant and toddler development have examined the relationship between the child and his or her mother. A considerable amount of literature has expanded upon that tradition to emphasize the father's role in parenting (Clarke-Stewart, 1978; Lamb, 1976). Belsky (1981) has noted however, that the inclusion of the father in the study of infancy does more than create an additional parent-infant relationship. It transforms the mother-infant dyad into a family system comprised of husband-wife as well as mother-infant and father-infant relationships. Reductions in parent-infant interaction associated with the presence of the second parent. Belsky (1979) reported that mothers as well as fathers more frequently vocalized to, played with, stimulated, and held their 15 month-olds when they were alone with their toddlers than when in the presence of the other parent. In fact, naturalistic observations within the family context have shown that in the triadic situation, the father's presence affected not only the quantity but also the quality of the mother's behaviour toward the child. In the fathers' presence, the mothers not only interacted significantly less with their children, they also engaged in significantly less positive and responsive talk (Clarke-Stewart, 1978). Notably, infant behaviour was similarly influenced by social situation, with more social behaviour directed toward each parent when alone with them. Thus, the social situation appears to affect both parental behaviour to the child as well as the child's behaviour toward the parent(s). A systemic
approach explicitly recognizes these direct as well as indirect pathways of influence within the family.

Fathering appears to be more sensitive than mothering to the effects of the marital relationship (Howes & Markman, 1989; Easterbrooks & Emde, 1988; Parke & Tinsely, 1987). Men have been shown to characteristically respond to marital conflict by withdrawing from both their wives (Gottman & Levenson, 1988; Christensen & Heavey, 1990) and their children (Howes & Markman, 1989). The reverse direction of effect that needs to be acknowledged is that the father's withdrawal itself affects the marital quality. Studying the father's effect on the mother-child dyad by comparing dyad and triad interactions as a function of marital quality will allow one to observe what is happening in these two different systems. It is known that quality of marriage raises the risk for child psychopathology, yet it is not known where the problem exists, whether in the dyad or the triad.

Cowan & Cowan's (1992) landmark longitudinal study tracked the transition and the changes in marriage around the birth of the first child. Their research indicates significant increases in overall marital dissatisfaction during that transition to parenthood. They found links between marital satisfaction, satisfaction with decision making around childcare issues, parenting behaviours and child outcomes. Mothers and fathers who were more satisfied with the way they resolved child care issues (regardless of their particular childcare arrangements), were more authoritative, characterized by warmth, involvement and consistent limit-setting, with their children and also more satisfied with their marriage. Parents' disagreement about their work and family arrangements played out in their
relationship as a couple, in their relationships with their child, and in their child's social
development. When marriages were more conflictual, parents were less warm, responsive,
structured and limit-setting with their three and a half year old preschoolers. Those same
preschoolers were rated two years later by their kindergarten teacher as being more shy
and withdrawn. Cowan & Cowan's findings highlight the central role of marital satisfaction
and its effects on parenting and child outcome.

There are several dimensions of parental behaviour that have consistently been shown
to be important for children's development. Although there is considerable overlap,
different dimensions appear to be particularly salient at different developmental periods:
parent-child attachment, with the emphasis on the provision of protection and emotional
support in times of stress; limit setting; the inculcation of moral values and concern for
others; and parental involvement with the child as both teacher and play partner.

Attachment theorists (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters & Wall, 1978; Bowlby, 1969; Sroufe,
1985) see the quality of the early mother-infant relationship as the prototype of all later
relationships. They also see it as providing the foundation for later cognitive and social
development. Maternal sensitivity to infant signals is hypothesized to be a central
determinant of early interaction, which influences the quality of the attachment relationship
that develops over the course of the first year. Mothers who are able to read their infants'
distress signals and are available to respond quickly and appropriately, will be more likely
to develop a secure attachment with their infants. Based on this history of positive
interactions with accessible, sensitive and responsive mothers, babies learn that the world
is predictable and supportive. They feel free to explore, confident that they will be
protected. Based on this first relationship they develop internal working models of relationships in general. When they are older and able to represent their needs, mother and child now negotiate and make plans together based on the coordination of their respective needs in the goal-corrected partnership (Bowlby, 1988).

By toddlerhood, the focus shifts from predominantly quality of caregiving to the socialization: the parents' ability to set limits and provide guidance for acceptable behaviour. Baumrind (1967) indicates that authoritative parenting, a pattern likely to be associated with higher levels of child competence and prosocial behaviour, is characterized by warmth and involvement in the context of clear, consistent and reasonable limit-setting. The bulk of evidence also indicates that this pattern of parenting should be associated with much lower rates of behaviour problems than either of the other two patterns, authoritarian or permissive parental behaviour.

Interactional history has been shown to be a key concept in the effectiveness of the socialization relationship. Maccoby and Martin (1983) indicate that limit-setting and control appear to be most effective in the context of a positive affective relationship between mother and child. Pettit & Bates (1989) found that proactive maternal involvement, comprised of mother initiated social contact combined with teaching, at four years of age was best predicted by the absence of negative involvement at earlier ages. Early negative involvement predicted low levels of later positive involvement as well as higher levels of aversive involvement. Pettit & Bates suggest that positive parent behaviour may inhibit children's expression of negativity. By engaging the child positively and proactively, the parent may be setting the stage for subsequent social encounters
where the child is more receptive to the parent's wishes. Thus, a positive affective bond is created between the parent and child, so that when control is used, it is more effective. These findings indicate the significant role of early positive involvement in children's social development. What was found to be lacking among distressed mother-child dyads is this positive involvement (Gardner, 1987; 1989). It has also been suggested that young children with oppositional problems have not experienced joint planning or sharing of internal states with their mothers, including negotiating around goals, an important aspect of socialization with toddlers (Greenberg and Speltz, 1988). This will potentially have later implications for affect regulation and perspective-taking. The focus of this study will be on maternal behaviours and socialization strategies appropriate to toddlerhood: discussing and negotiating goals, reasoning and providing structure which includes setting limits, redirecting attention and aligning goals.

The parent-child relationship is a powerful context for understanding the ways in which emotions are expressed and socialized. Responsive parents have been shown to engage their toddlers in dialogues about their own and other's feelings as well as expectations for behaviour (Dunn, 1988; Zahn-Waxler, Radke-Yarrow, & King, 1979). Situations when children are upset are likely to be opportunities for them to learn about the causes and consequences of emotions from discussion with their parents. However, in families in which anger and distress are expressed with high frequency, such situations are less likely to be opportunities for learning. The literature indicates that children in families in which negative emotions are frequently or intensely expressed are more likely to have difficulties
in their relations with peers and to be less successful at recognizing emotions (Dunn & Brown, 1994; Dunn, Brown & Beardsall, 1990).

There are also indications that there are negative consequences of not explaining or talking about emotions. Certain children, particularly those exhibiting psychopathology cannot talk about emotions. Camras, Ribordy, Hill, Martino et al., (1990) found that abused children were less able than nonabused children to recognize emotions in a laboratory task. Cicchetti & Beeghly (1987) also found that maltreated children spoke less about their negative internal states than did nonmaltreated children, used proportionately fewer internal state terms overall, and showed less differentiation in their attributional focus than did their nonmaltreated peers.

There are many possible explanations for such a pattern of findings including generally poorer language in children at risk. One possible explanation is that because of the stress and preoccupation in the adults in the children’s environments, these children are exposed to less talk about emotionally significant issues.

Frequency of emotion talk within the family is associated with later success on verbal assessments of emotion understanding (Dunn, Brown & Beardsall, 1991; Dunn, Brown, Slomkowski, et al., 1991). Dunn & Brown (1994) also found that the frequent expression of anger or distress within the family when the child was 33 months old, was associated with poorer performance on the emotion-understanding task 7 months later. Beyond frequency of emotion talk, Gottman (1997) suggests that emotion coaching is the mechanism by which children can be buffered from the harmful effects of marital conflict, tension and aggression. It is those parents who acknowledge negative emotions that are in
a better position to help their children as well as themselves cope with and understand their negative feelings. Parents who use emotion coaching value the power and the purpose of emotions as well as their function in their lives. They teach their children about emotions within the context of an empathic relationship that attempts to align with their child's goals (Dix, 1991). They recognize emotional episodes as opportunities for intimacy and teaching, labeling emotions, structuring children's emotions and setting limits on behaviour while helping children problem solve. It is within the context of the family system that toddlers learn about the purpose of emotional expressions; which emotions are responded to, how and why. This allows them to develop schemas, ways of understanding emotions as functional communications between people.

Hooven, Gottman & Katz (1995) found that parents' meta-emotion, or ability to think about feelings, as well as their subsequent emotion coaching significantly predicted those children three years later who showed less negative emotion in their play, fewer behaviour problems and less evidence of stress. It was also associated with less hostile marriages as well as less negative and more positive parent-child interactions. Interestingly, Hooven et al. also indicate that when marriages were poor, fathers withdrew from both their wives and their children, as previously cited research also indicates. Wives were found to withdraw only from their husbands and not from their children. Dickstein & Parke (1988) found that in situations that are ambiguous, babies continue to actively seek out emotional and instrumental information from unhappily married mothers but do not continue to do so to unhappily married fathers. Therefore, as unhappily married fathers withdraw from their families, there is less opportunity for shared, reciprocal affective communication and also
fewer experiences for the infant to learn to use their father as an important source of emotional information. It appears that something is happening not only around the quality of information that infants are receiving, but also their expectations of its availability.

Within the interaction history, if the fathers' responding has been inconsistent and unavailable, the infants learn not to rely on it. They generalize from past interaction patterns to the current referencing situation. It is important to acknowledge the possibility that these infants are merely responding to interaction with the parent, which are affected by marital problems for fathers but not for mothers. Regardless, these findings do seem to indicate that fathers and mothers play important yet distinct roles, as well as the fact that infants are active participants in the acquisition of affective information within the family context. They also underscore the importance of the marital relationship for understanding social-emotional interactions between parents and their young children.

There is little in the current literature detailing what happens in the family around the socialization of negative emotions. There is however, a 3-component model of parenting which places the activation, regulation and engagement of emotion at the centre of parental competence. Dix (1991) theorizes that emotions are vital to effective parenting. Positive emotions organize sensitive parenting whereas chronic negative emotion, as in distressed relationships, is considered as both a cause and a consequence of interactions that undermine both parents' concerns and childrens' development. Strong negative emotions interfere with thorough cognitive appraisal. As a result, when parents bring strong negative emotions from a situation that does not involve children, such as anger with their spouse, into a situation that does involve children, such as play, they can also
bring poorly matched inclinations to that child-rearing task. For example, the anger they feel as appropriate to spousal conflict, promotes the removal of obstruction. In the child-rearing setting, if this goal is brought to the parent-child interaction, it will interfere with empathic concern for the child's needs in that situation.

It has also been argued that parents' emotions reflect the quality of parenting, and act as a barometer for the health of the parent-child relationship (Dix, 1991). Parental warmth has consistently predicted favourable developmental outcomes for children, whereas parental hostility has consistently predicted unfavourable outcomes (Grusec & Lytton, 1988; Maccoby & Martin, 1983). The negative emotions characteristic of distressed parents cause parent-child interactions to lack coordination. Distressed mothers, perhaps overwhelmed by immediate life tasks or marital problems, may suppress or never activate the empathic child-orientation that normally motivates effective parenting and socialization efforts (Dix, 1991). In fact, parents in distressed marriages have been shown to exhibit a pattern of physiological underarousal when interacting with children on a teaching task (Gottman & Katz, 1989). Their parenting is cold, unresponsive, and low in limit setting. In contrast, positive emotions are thought to promote sensitive care, early parent-child bonding, and parents' willingness to teach and encourage their children (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Belsky, 1984). Theoretically, empathic emotions motivate attunement to children, facilitate responsiveness to children's goals, and enable parents and children to co-ordinate their interactions in a way that is mutually beneficial (Dix, 1991; Stern, 1985).

Campos, Campos & Barrett (1989) note that the ecology of the family environment determines the exposure of the developing child to emotion signals. They mention a
number of ways by which ecological factors affect emotion, most notably being the principle of exposure whereby the caregiver allows the child to encounter affect-eliciting circumstances. Some parents provide few opportunities for their children to see negative emotions like sadness or anger. They may also control the environment to minimize the likelihood that the child will experience unpleasantness. The child’s ecology also includes the family’s emotional climate, which is the proportion of the time that the child encounters laughter, fearfulness, anger or other emotions. This has implications for the child’s emotional development, even when the emotions are not directed primarily at the child. Parke (1994) has also highlighted the need for further research recognizing the embeddedness of emotion in social interactions, relationships and contexts. The link between quality of marriage and the parent-child relationship in the socialization of negative emotion is important precisely because it helps us to further understand children's developing patterns of emotionality. It is through interactions with their parent(s) that the child learns the expression of emotion within the context of that relationship; how to respond to his/her parents' emotions, how his/her parents' emotions elicit emotions in himself/herself, and how his/her communications subsequently affect his/her parent(s).

Research does indicate that even transient negative emotions between adults have been shown to cause distress and aggression in infants and young children (Cohn & Tronick, 1983; Cummings, Ianotti & Zahn-Waxler, 1985). Cummings, Ballard, El-Sheikh, and Lake (1991) reported that exposure to unresolved conflict between adults is associated with negative affect and poor coping responses in children. As previously mentioned, infants socially reference less to maritally dissatisfied versus satisfied fathers (Dickstein & Parke,
and carry-over effects have been indicated showing that toddlers build expectations or working models about how people interact with one another (Jenkins, Franco, Dolins & Sewell, 1995). The link between the quality of the marital relationship, the resulting quality of the parental affective signals and children's developing emotionality is an area that needs to be further studied. Differences in the duration and intensity of child distress during a frustration eliciting task may reflect differences in these developing patterns of negative emotionality.

Therefore, observing parents interacting with their child around a negative emotion induced task, such as a frustration-eliciting task, will offer the opportunity to observe maternal socialization attempts to help the child deal with, or understand their negative feelings. An experimental design comparing dyadic and triadic interactions will enable one to look at the effect of the father on the mother's behaviour towards the child and further differentiate where this socialization is occurring, whether in the dyad or the triad.

Key Questions in this Study

The purpose and main question of this study is to investigate whether there are differences in maternal socialization of toddlers' negative emotions as well as the amount of distress toddlers display within a frustration-eliciting event, as a function of marital quality and dyadic versus triadic interaction. Thus, there are three main questions to be answered.
Questions/Hypotheses:

1) The first question concerns the main effect of quality of marriage. Will maternal responses to their child differ as a function of marital quality? It is expected that mothers in good marriages will provide more reasoning and structure to help their child understand and learn how to deal with their feelings when compared with mothers in poor marriages. It is also expected that they will provide more goal talk, align goals more often and redirect attention less as a strategy to soothe distress when compared with mothers in poor marriages. It is expected that babies of parents in good marriages will display less distress than babies of parents in poor marriages.

2) The second question concerns the main effect of dyad versus triad.

Does the father’s presence have an effect on the mother’s behaviour with the child as evidenced in the triadic versus the dyadic interaction? It is hypothesized that mothers will provide less goal talk, reasoning and structure, redirecting attention and align goals less overall in the triad than the dyad. It is also hypothesized that babies will display more distress in the triad than the dyad.

3) The third question centers around the interaction between quality of marriage and dyadic versus triadic interaction. Even though the father’s presence will affect the mother’s responding, it is
hypothesized that this effect will be smaller in the good
marriage compared to the poor. As a result, in the poor marriage,
particularly in the triad, mothers will provide less goal talk, less
reason/structure and align goals less, and toddlers will display
more distress, whereas in the good marriage, the father’s
presence won’t make as much of a difference to the
mother’s responses or the toddler’s distress.
CHAPTER TWO - METHODS

Subjects:

32 families consisting of a mother, father and toddler aged 18-28 months were recruited from the community through daycares and drop-in centres. Overall, 19 boys and 13 girls participated. The majority (23) of these toddlers were first-borns, 5 were second-born, 3 were third-born and 1 was fourth-born. These centres served a largely middle-class population but they did also serve a small number of working class families. There were two groups: good and poor marriage. Assignment into groups occurred by screening the couples before hand and getting the range of scores from their responses on the Marital Adjustment Test (Locke-Wallace, 1959), a questionnaire assessing marital satisfaction. A median split based on the scores placed the couples into the aforementioned two groups. Everyone was then exposed to a dyad and triad condition which was counterbalanced for order.

Research Design:

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Procedure:

Families were seen in their homes. All observations were videotaped for later coding. The female experimenter greeted the parents and child and carefully reviewed the
procedures with them, read out the consent form and explained the aims of the study. The parents were then asked to complete The Marital Adjustment Test (Locke-Wallace, 1959). This part of the session lasted approximately 15 minutes. Once the questionnaires were completed, as previously mentioned, the families were assigned to a marital group by the examiner scoring their responses on the MAT and placing them in the appropriate group. The videotaped frustration eliciting task interaction took place following the group placement.

The frustration eliciting task began with the mother and toddler playing in the room, or the father, mother and toddler, depending on the assigned order. The toddler was given a toy to play with which the experimenter had brought with her. The toy had tested with children in several daycares in order to ensure that it would have intrinsic interest value for the children. Each child then played with the toy for 2 minutes. At the end of the two minutes, the examiner entered the room, took the toy from the child and told them that they may not play with it right now. She then placed the toy in a locked briefcase that was placed in front of the child on the floor, and left the room. A videocamera which had been set up on a tripod, recorded the toddler’s reactions to the event as well as the mother’s responses to her child for that two minute period. The camera was placed in the corner of the room facing the parent(s) and child. At the end of the two minutes, the examiner re-entered the room, gave the toy back to the baby, and told them that they “may play with the toy now”. At this point, coding ceased. The same procedure and the same toy were used in both the dyad and triad interaction so that there would not be a toy effect.
Therefore, for each family there were two 2 minute observation periods, one dyad and one triad interaction, counterbalanced within each group to control for order effects. The break between observation periods consisted of a two minute free play session for the child. Observations were coded only during the two minute frustration-eliciting task and not during the prior two minute play session. Coding consisted of a frequency count of maternal socialization strategies as well as a timing of the duration of child distress and a global rating of the level of child distress.

Measures:

Marital Satisfaction was assessed, as previously mentioned, by The Marital Adjustment Test (Locke-Wallace, 1959). This is a 15 item measure of overall marital satisfaction. Low scores signify greater satisfaction and higher scores signify dissatisfaction. The MAT is one of the most widely used measures of marital functioning and has well-documented validity and reliability (Gottman, Markman, & Notarius, 1977).

Coding of Maternal Socialization of Emotion when the child was distressed:

The mother's attempts to help the child understand and deal with his/her feelings of distress were observed and coded in a frequency count on the following measures:

Goal Talk was operationalized as the mother acknowledging the child's feelings or directly addressing what the child wants.

Examples include "I know you want the toy back", "you really liked that toy didn't you?" or "are you sad that the toy has gone away?"

This was measured as a count of the number of times each incident occurred within the two minute observation period. An incident was partitioned as a phrase, usually centering around one theme, or a series of phrases with the same theme, without a two second gap before the next phrase. With the presence of a two second gap,
or a new theme, a new incident was coded.

Therefore, if the mother said, “John, I know you want that toy back, you want it back don’t you?” and there was not a 2 second gap in between her repeating those phrases, then it would be counted as one incident. If there was more than a two second gap between her verbalizing John’s goal, it would be coded as two separate responses. However, if she said, “John, I know you want that toy back, are you sad that it has gone away?” even if there had not been a two second gap between phrases, it would be coded as two incidents since clearly a new theme had been introduced. The mother verbalized John’s goal of getting the toy back as well as his feelings about the toy’s removal. The repetition of the child’s name along with the phrase did not count as a separate incident because it followed so closely with the phrase and did not serve a separate purpose other than attracting the child’s attention.

**Reason/Structure** was operationalized as the mother offering a specific rationale or explanation to the child as to why the toy was being put away in an attempt to help them understand the situation.

Examples of this would be, “we can’t play with that toy right now”, ” the toy has to go to sleep for a while”, “bye-bye toy”, “see you later alligator”, or “ we will get the toy back very soon”.

Again, this was measured as a count of the number of times each incident occurred within the two minute observation period. An incident was partitioned as a phrase, usually centering around one theme, or a series of phrases with the same theme, without a two second gap before the next phrase. With the presence of a two second gap, or a new theme, a new incident was coded.

Therefore, if the mother said, ” we can’t play with the toy right now Kate, it’s going away” and there was not a 2 second gap in between her repeating those phrases, then it would be counted as one incident. If there was more than a two second gap between her explanations to Kate about the toy’s removal, it would be coded as two separate responses. However, if she said, “Kate, the toy is going away for a while, see ya later alligator (perhaps while waving good bye to the toy)” even if there had not been a two second gap between phrases, it would be coded as two incidents since clearly a new theme had been introduced.
Redirect Attention was operationalized as the mother’s attempts to redirect his/her child’s attention by arousing interest in something else, or engaging the child in another activity, in effect substituting the child’s goal.

Examples of this would be “let’s play with a puzzle”, “want to play with your ball?” “ride your rocking-horse”.

Again, this was measured as a count of the number of times each incident occurred within the two minute observation period. An incident was partitioned as a phrase, usually centering around one theme, or a series of phrases on the same theme, without a two second gap before the next phrase. With the presence of a two second gap, or a new theme, a new incident was coded.

Therefore, if the mother said, ”Ann, let’s read a book, Ann, let’s read a book together” and there was not a 2 second gap in between her repeating those phrases, then it would be counted as one incident. If there was more than a two second gap between her offering Ann the choice of reading the book, it would be coded as two separate responses. However, if she said, “Ann, let’s read a book, Ann, why don’t we do a puzzle” even if there had not been a two second gap between phrases, it would be coded as two incidents since clearly a new theme had been introduced. The child had been offered two alternatives: to read a book or do a puzzle. The repetition of the child’s name along with the phrase did not count as a separate incident because it followed so closely with the phrase and did not serve a separate purpose other than attracting the child’s attention.

Goal Alignment: was operationalized as a rating of the mother’s attempts to align goals with her child when the child was distressed. This was strictly a behavioural measure evidenced by the mother gesturally aligning with her child’s goals. If the mother verbally aligned goals with her child, it was coded as Goal Talk.

Examples of this would be the mother getting down on the floor beside her child and trying to figure out the briefcase lock when that is clearly the child’s goal, or noticing that the child wants soothing and attempting to hug or comfort him/her.

This was measured as a count of the number of times each incident occurred within the two minute observation period. An incident was partitioned as a behaviour, usually centering around one theme,
or a series of behaviours with the same theme, without a two second gap before the next gesture. With the presence of a two second gap, or a new theme, a new incident was coded.

Therefore, if the mother sat down on the floor beside the child and attempted to manipulate the briefcase lock with the child when he/she clearly indicated that this was his/her goal, and there was not a 2 second gap between her repeating those behaviours, then it would be counted as one incident. If there was more than a two second gap between her attempts to gesturally align goals with her child around the briefcase, it would be coded as two separate attempts. However, if she attempted to align goals with her child around the briefcase and then the child’s goal clearly changed to wanting comfort and in response the mother hugged or soothed the child, even if there had not been a two second gap between gestures, it would be coded as two incidents since clearly a new theme had been introduced. If the mother verbalized the child’s goal of getting the toy back, it would be coded as an incident of Goal Talk and not Goal Alignment.

Child Outcome Measures:

1) Child's level of distress upon removal of the toy. A Likert-type scale with ratings ranging from 1 to 5 (1=not distressed, 5=very distressed).

2) Child's duration of distress - the number of seconds during which the child exhibited distress during the interaction.

Distress was defined as the child showing evidence of being upset or bothered that the toy had been taken away, including crying, pouting, whining, and attempts to get the toy back. The child's focus was on the toy and they made attempts to get it back. If the child's attention, either spontaneously or by direction, became focused on another object or person (which was noted), distress was no longer coded.
Inter-rater Reliability:

The videotaped interactions were coded by an independent rater who was blind to marital quality. The experimenter coded 20% of the tapes in order to establish inter-rater reliability. Agreement was assessed using Pearson product moment correlations, which ranged from $r = .87 - .99$. 
CHAPTER THREE - RESULTS

The terms good and poor marriage will be used for the two groups; however, that is just for convenience as these marriages were not in the distressed range. The following Table summarizes mean toddler ages and marital scores within the two groups.

Table 1 - means of toddler age and marital score within good and poor marriage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Good marriage</th>
<th>Poor marriage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Toddler age (months)</td>
<td>X= 24</td>
<td>X= 22.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAT score</td>
<td>X= 6.3</td>
<td>X= 18.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Original Table: (measure of marital satisfaction)

Preliminary analyses:

The objective of the present study was to examine maternal socialization of toddler distress as a function of marital quality and dyad versus triad interaction. We were hypothesizing main effects of 1) marital quality and 2) dyadic/triadic interaction on outcome variables. We also predicted 3) an interaction between marital quality and dyadic/triadic interaction. In order to test for all three hypotheses, a repeated measures ANOVA procedure was carried out with marital quality and order of interaction as between subjects factors, and dyad and triad interaction as the within subjects variable.

Distributions for all variables were examined. As they were all found to be positively skewed, square root transformations were applied.

Due to the large range in toddler age, 18 - 28 months, it was important to see whether age was affecting the relationship between marital quality and child distress. In order to do that, the correlation between marital quality and child distress was examined, r(32)=.13, p< .49. The partial correlation between marital quality and child distress controlling for age was also examined, r(32)=.13, p< .45. It did not seem that age was an important
factor. As age was counterbalanced in the study design with children the same ages in each group and it didn't appear to have an effect on the relationship between marital quality and child distress, age was not covaried out in analyses.

**Child Distress:**

The child outcome variables are the duration of child distress and the level of child distress shown in the dyad and triad. To examine the association between these two variables, Pearson product moment correlations were conducted, r(32)=.88, p<.001. Since they turned out to be so highly correlated, and they both showed the same pattern with all outcome variables, we decided to use only child duration of distress in analyses.

Contrary to hypotheses, no significant main effects were found for Dyad/Triad, F(1,27)= 2.50, p<.125, or Marital Quality, F(1,27)= 1.32, p<.26. However, a Marital Quality by Dyad/Triad interaction was significant, F(1,27)= 6.34, p<.018 as well as Order by Marital Quality, F(1,27)= 4.58, p<.041.

Toddlers in good marriages expressed similar amounts of distress in the dyad and triad. However, toddlers in poor marriages expressed significantly more distress in the dyad than the triad as can be seen in Figure 1.

![Figure 1 - Means of Child Duration of Distress as a function of Marital Quality and Dyad/Triad](image-url)
There was also more variability in the amount of distress expressed upon first exposure to the task, with less variability upon second exposure. Toddlers in poor marriages reacted more intensely to what they experienced first, expressing the most distress overall, as can be seen in Figure 2.

![Figure 2 - Means of Child Duration of Distress across Marital Quality and Order](image)

Thus, it appears that in both the dyad and triad, the relationship context (first and second exposure and dyad versus triad) is affecting the toddlers and they appear to be sensitized to it. Toddlers in good marriages show almost no difference in the amount of distress they exhibit on first or second exposure to the frustration task, or when they are in the dyad or triad. However, toddlers in poor marriages seemed to vary more in their behaviour as a function both of whether they are with one or both parents and whether they are being exposed to frustration for the first or second time.

**Child Distress and Maternal Behaviour:**

In watching the tapes, it seemed to be the case that the mothers were responding to their child’s crying with more soothing and redirecting attention. We wanted to examine
the relationship between maternal behaviours and child distress to see whether they
covaried strongly. Given that we already know that there is a relation between marital
quality and child distress, we wanted to make sure that subsequent findings weren’t all an
effect of distress. Pearson product moment correlations were carried out. These are given
in Table 2.

Table 2 - Pearson product moment correlations between child duration of distress and maternal behaviour

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child Duration of Distress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reason/Structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p&lt; .040 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal Talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p&lt; .738</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redirect Attention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p&lt; .058</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p< .05 . ** p< .01

Reason/structure was significantly correlated with child duration of distress, and
redirect attention showed a strong trend towards significance. Based on these results, it
appeared likely that mothers were responding to their toddlers’ distress and doing more
with them in terms of reason/structure and redirect attention (but not goal talk) at higher
levels of distress.

Maternal behaviour as a function of marital quality and dyadic/triadic interaction
controlling for child distress:

Because there was such a strong relationship between the toddlers’ distress and the
mothers’ responses, child duration of distress was entered as a covariate in all subsequent
analyses to ensure that the relationships seen were not just a result of the child’s distress.
**Goal Talk**

No significant main effects were found for Dyad/Triad interaction, $F(1,27)= .62$, $p<.438$, Marital Quality, $F(1,27)=.68$, $p<.416$ or the interaction of Dyad/Triad by Marital Quality, $F(1,27)= .02$, $p<.898$. In summary, contrary to expectations, there was no evidence that Goal Talk varied as a function of Dyad/Triad interaction or Marital Quality.

**Reason/Structure**

Significant main effects were found for Dyad/Triad interaction, $F(1,27)= 8.48$, $p<.007$ and also for Marital Quality, $F(1,27)= 4.77$, $p<.038$. No significant interaction effects were found for Dyad/Triad by Marital Quality $F(1,27)=.12$, $p<.734$. As hypothesized, there was more Reason/Structure provided in the dyad than the triad and less in the poor marriage group as can be seen in Figure 3.

![Figure 3 - Mean of reason/structure as a function of Marital Quality and Dyad/Triad](image)

In summary, there was evidence that reason/structure varied as a function of dyad/triad and marital quality but that no interaction was present. Toddlers in poor marriages receive less reason/structure, and toddlers overall receive less in the triad than the dyad.
Redirect Attention

No significant effects were found for Dyad/Triad, \( F(1,27) = 1.49, p<.232 \), Marital Quality, \( F(1,27) = 0.09, p<.763 \), or the interaction of Dyad/Triad and Marital Quality, \( F(1,27) = 1.05, p<.32 \). In summary, contrary to expectations, there was no evidence that Redirect Attention varied as a function of Dyad/Triad or Marital Quality.

Goal Alignment

No significant effects were found for Dyad/Triad, \( F(1,27) = 0.60, p<.446 \), Marital Quality, \( F(1,27) = 0.15, p<.704 \), or the interaction of Dyad/Triad and Marital Quality, \( F(1,27) = 0.86, p<.361 \). In summary, contrary to expectations, there was no evidence that Goal Alignment varied as a function of Dyad/Triad or Marital Quality.

Summary

The most distress was expressed by toddlers in poor marriages in the dyad while toddlers in good marriages showed a similar level of distress across first or second exposure to the frustrating task and across the dyad or triad. Because of the strong relationship between toddlers’ distress and mothers’ responses, child distress was covaried out in all analyses looking at differences in maternal behaviour as it appeared likely that mothers were reacting to their child’s distress.

Contrary to hypotheses, there were no significant main or interaction effects for goal talk, redirect attention and goal alignment. However, there was confirmation of hypotheses around reason and structure for both marital quality and dyad/triad. Toddlers of parents in good marriages and in dyads received more reason/structure overall. In sum, the relationship context (first or second exposure and dyad versus triad) is affecting not
only the distress that the toddlers are exhibiting, but also the responses that the mothers are making.
CHAPTER FOUR - DISCUSSION

In this exploratory study, differences were found in the socialization of toddler distress as a function of marital quality and dyadic versus triadic interaction. It illuminates what happens in the family by observing the effect of the father's presence on the mother-child dyad. This allows the findings to move beyond the strictly correlational research that has been done comparing mothers' and fathers' interactions with their children. By incorporating socialization attempts, it allows observation of not only how mothers are interacting with their children, but also how they are attempting to teach their children about frustrating events as a function of marital quality and dyad/triad. Results indicate that there is more reason and structure provided in good than poor marriages and that this socialization is occurring mainly in the dyad.

In terms of child distress, children in poor marriages show marked distress the first time they are frustrated and show much less distress the second time that they are frustrated. Children in good marriages show a more uniform reaction both times that they are frustrated. Children in poor marriages shared higher levels of distress when they were just with their mothers, a relationship that was not evident in children in good marriages.

It is felt that the differential distress exhibited as a function of marriage speaks to the toddlers' developing emotionality, with apparently more negative and lower thresholds seen in toddlers in poor marriages. An alternate explanation, however, is that the toddlers in poor marriages feel more distressed when they are with their mothers.

Based on the strong significant relationship between mothers' responses and toddlers' distress, it appeared likely that mothers were responding to their toddlers' distress. Since
distress was associated with marital quality, we wanted to make sure that subsequent
findings weren't all an effect of distress. Because of this, child distress was covaried out in
all subsequent analyses.

This study illuminated processes involved in the socialization of toddlers' negative
emotions within the family as a function of marital quality and dyadic and triadic
interactions. It is an important contribution because little is known about the evolution and
organization of family interaction patterns around the socialization of negative emotion
during the early childhood years. However, while it highlights important group as well as
dyad differences in the amount of reasoning and structure mothers provide in a frustration
eliciting task, it does not indicate significant differences in the amount of goal or emotion
talk as was hypothesized. It is possible that the relatively young age of the children
influenced the low level of goal talk. Although researchers have indicated the importance
of early labeling of emotion in an attempt to help the young child put their feelings into
language in order to structure emotions for the child and allow them to participate in a
negotiated shared meaning (Gottman, 1997; Stern 1985), perhaps parents do not begin to
do so until they see more developed language skills in their child. The children in this
study ranged in age from 18 to 28 months. Most of the research on emotion talk has
studied 3 year old children and older. Perhaps the differentiation between these two types
of talk is that reason/structure is provided in an attempt to help the children understand the
practicalities of the task rather than a more abstract conversation about feelings and goals.
Perhaps more advanced cognitive skills are needed as well as language development to
support the emergence of emotion/goal talk.
It is also possible that this type of discussion about children's emotions and goals usually takes place in the context of calm reflective discussion when family members are not directly concerned with immediate practical goals, such as lessening child distress. Perhaps parents are focusing more on attempting to lessen their child's immediate distress within the expectations of this somewhat contrived task rather than focus on a more long-term socialization goal of understanding negative emotion.

Research has indicated that parents determine opportunities for their children to learn about emotions; however, we saw that the toddlers' level of distress is also gauging maternal level of response to some degree. The mothers in this study appeared to be responding to their toddlers' distress. It also appears that these socialization opportunities, as measured by instances of reasoning and structure, are happening more in the dyad than the triad, and more in good marriages than poor.

Contrary to expectations, there was a weak association found between outcome variables and marital quality. It is quite possible that this study measured parents' anticipation at meeting task demands, masking group differences. The task is contrived and unnatural, somewhat lacking in ecological validity. It is possible that mothers will "perform" because she feels she is expected to, but it might not be a true measure of her day-to-day interaction with her child. This may be particularly true in the triadic interaction, where she may compensate or alternatively compete with the father.

It is also noteworthy that this sample represented a relatively maritally satisfied group. With a larger sample and a wider range of responses, even stronger effects of marital quality may be found. For future study, more variability in marriage quality is
recommended by implementing wide screening measures. As well, a measure of marital conflict should be included in order to focus more closely on the one aspect of marriage that has been shown to be highly predictive of negative child outcome, particularly an increased risk for externalizing disorders.

During the frustration eliciting task, not all children became distressed by the toy's removal. Some children were very distressed, and some were not bothered at all. It is possible that the children may also not be as frustrated in the experimental situation due to task demands, i.e., a new person being in his/her home, the use of a video camera etc. This may also be an untrue reflection of the child's usual reactivity. It is quite possible within the everyday pattern of interaction that he/she would become more frustrated by an event similar to this one.

It is also possible that the child's temperament is activating parental responses. It is likely that parents have to work harder with and are more stressed by temperamentally "difficult" children. Perhaps it is frustration with their child that is affecting parents' marital satisfaction. The question of direction of effects is an important one that should attempt to be answered in future studies, perhaps by including a standardized measure of toddler temperament, or having difficult and easy toddlers as part of the design.

A narrower age range is recommended even though when age was controlled for in partial correlations there was no significant effect on distress level. The recommended age is 18 - 21 months because it is an age at which negative responses to frustration are normative, but also one in which the child is just beginning to learn to represent ideas symbolically. Children beyond 24 months are much better able to represent the cognitive
demands of this task, and therefore the amount of needed parental involvement is much less. It is also recommended that the type of task chosen be one that is more naturalistic and typical of an everyday event such as toy clean-up. This would perhaps be better able to capture the dynamics of the child's life and represent what the child's as well as the mother's typical reaction would be. It is notable that the research indicating that the father's presence affects the quantity and quality of the mother's responses to her child, involved naturalistic observations in the home (Clarke-Stewart, 1978). As our research task utilized an induced negative emotion or frustration eliciting task, it is not reflective of naturally occurring incidents. Naturalistic observations allow for a more accurate representation of the frequency and intensity of negative emotion events as they typically occur. Also, being less contrived, they may enable parent(s) and children to feel more comfortable and act more naturally.

The above recommendations are made in order to further refine upon the measures and methods used in this study. However, it is important to note that there are still important implications in these data for understanding child development in the context of family relationships and marital satisfaction. By comparing the contribution of dyad, mother-child, as well as triad, mother-father-child, interaction, we were able to look at where the socialization of negative emotion is occurring as a function of marital quality within the demands of this task. Results indicated overall that the relationship context made a difference not only to the amount of distress that the toddlers showed, but also to what they received. Toddlers in poor marriages received less reasoning and structure about their distress, and the reasoning and structure received overall by both groups occurs more in
the dyad than the triad. It is recognized that these two samples of behaviour represent pieces of a complex family puzzle. However, it is felt that these pieces are contributory to an increased understanding of what happens in families around the socialization of negative emotions, and how that differs as a function of marital quality.
References


APPENDIX

Maternal Socialization of Toddler Distress Coding Measures

The behavioural codes will be used to collect data by events based coding in frequency counts.

Order of interaction Dyad _____ / or Triad_____ Date __________ Family #________

Code for a frequency count of the list of operationalized behaviours.

Maternal Responses:

Goal Talk - is operationalized as the mother acknowledging
the child’s feelings or directly addressing what the child wants.

Examples include “I know you want the toy back”, “you
really liked that toy didn’t you?” or “are you sad that
the toy has gone away?”

This will be measured as a count of the number of times each incident
occurs within the two minute observation period. An incident
will be partitioned as a phrase, usually centering around one theme,
or a series of phrases on the same theme, without a two second gap
before the next phrase. With the presence of a two second gap,
or a new theme, a new incident will be coded.

Therefore, if the mother says,” John, I know you want that toy back,
you want it back don’t you?” and there is not a 2 second gap
in between her repeating those phrases, then it will be counted
as one incident. If there is more than a two second gap between
her verbalizing John’s goal, it will be coded as two separate
responses. However, if she says, “John, I know you want that toy
back, are you sad that it has gone away?” even if there is not
a two second gap between phrases, it will be coded as two
incidents since clearly a new theme has been introduced. The mother
verbalized John’s goal of getting the toy back as well as his feelings
about the toy’s removal. The repetition of the child’s name along with
the phrase does not count as a separate incident because it follows so closely
with the phrase and does not serve a separate purpose other than attracting the
child’s attention.
Maternal Socialization of Toddler Distress Coding Measures

Maternal Responses Continued:

Reason/Structure is operationalized as the mother offering a specific rationale or explanation to the child as to why the toy is being put away in an attempt to help them understand the situation.

Examples of this would be, "we can’t play with that toy right now”, ”the toy has to go to sleep for a while”, “bye-bye toy”, “see you later alligator”, or “we will get the toy back very soon”.

Again, this will be measured as a count of the number of times each incident occurs within the two minute observation period. An incident will be partitioned as a phrase, usually centering around one theme, or a series of phrases on the same theme, without a two second gap before the next phrase. With the presence of a two second gap, or a new theme, a new incident will be coded.

Therefore, if the mother says, ”we can’t play with the toy right now Kate, it's going away” and there is not a 2 second gap in between her repeating those phrases, then it will be counted as one incident. If there is more than a two second gap between her explanations to Kate about the toy’s removal, it will be coded as two separate responses. However, if she says, “Kate, the toy is going away for a while, see ya later alligator (perhaps while waving good bye to the toy)” even if there has not been a two second gap between phrases, it will be coded as two incidents since clearly a new theme has been introduced.

Redirect Attention is operationalized as the mother's attempts to redirect their child's attention by arousing interest in something else, or engaging the child in another activity, in effect substituting the child's goal.

Examples of this would be “let’s play with a puzzle”, “ want to play with your ball?” “ride your rocking-horse”.

Again, this will be measured as a count of the number of times each incident occurs within the two minute observation period. An incident will be partitioned as a phrase, usually centering around one theme, or a series of phrases on the same theme, without a two second gap before the next phrase. With the presence of a two second gap, or a new theme, a new incident will be coded.
Maternal Socialization of Toddler Distress Coding Measures

Redirect Attention (Continued)

Therefore, if the mother says, "Ann, let's read a book, Ann, let's read a book together" and there is not a 2 second gap in between her repeating those phrases, then it will be counted as one incident. If there is more than a two second gap between her offering Ann the choice of reading the book, it will be coded as two separate responses. However, if she says, "Ann, let's read a book, Ann, why don't we do a puzzle" even if there has not been a two second gap between phrases, it will be coded as two incidents since clearly a new theme has been introduced. The child has been offered two alternatives: to read a book or do a puzzle. The repetition of the child's name along with the phrase does not count as a separate incident because it follows so closely with the phrase and does not serve a separate purpose other than attracting the child's attention.

Goal Alignment: was operationalized as a rating of the mother's attempts to align goals with her child when the child was distressed. This was strictly a behavioural measure evidenced by the mother gesturally aligning with her child's goals. If the mother verbally aligned goals with her child, it was coded as Goal Talk.

Examples of this would be the mother getting down on the floor beside her child and trying to figure out the briefcase lock when that is clearly the child’s goal, or noticing that the child wants soothing and attempting to hug or comfort him/her.

This was measured as a count of the number of times each incident occurred within the two minute observation period. An incident was partitioned as a behaviour, usually centering around one theme, or a series of behaviours with the same theme, without a two second gap before the next gesture. With the presence of a two second gap, or a new theme, a new incident was coded.

Therefore, if the mother sat down on the floor beside the child and attempted to manipulate the briefcase lock with the child when he/she clearly indicated that this was his/her goal, and there was not a 2 second gap between her repeating those behaviours, then it would be counted as one incident. If there was more than a two second gap between
her attempts to gesturally align goals with her child around the briefcase, it would be coded as two separate attempts. However, if she attempted to align goals with her child around the briefcase and then the child’s goal clearly changed to wanting comfort and in response the mother hugged or soothed the child, even if there had not been a two second gap between gestures, it would be coded as two incidents since clearly a new theme had been introduced. If the mother verbalized the child’s goal of getting the toy back, it would be coded as an incident of Goal Talk and not Goal Alignment.
Maternal Socialization of Toddler Distress Coding Sheet

**Dyad**

*Duration of child's distress:*

*Frequency Count of Maternal Behaviours:*

Goal Talk 

Reasoning/ Structure 

Redirect Attention 

Goal Alignment 

**Triad**

*Duration of child's distress:*

*Frequency Count of Maternal Behaviours:*

Goal Talk 

Reasoning / Structure 

Redirect attention 

Goal Alignment 

**Duration of Child's Distress:** Record the total time it takes for the child’s distress to end after the toy is removed. Distress is operationalized as the child showing facial features of distress, negative voice tone, crying or whining, and continued requests to parents for the toy as evidenced by pointing to toy, directing parents towards toy, with the full focus of child's attention remaining on the toy.
Rating Scale for Maternal Socialization of Toddler Distress

Child Measure

Child's Level of Distress

5 - child is very distressed by toy removal
   - evidenced by hard crying for longer than a minute
   - temper tantruming, kicking or hitting
   - screaming for parent to get the toy back
   - very distressed by having to wait

4 - child is noticeably distressed by the removal of the toy
   - evidenced by crying
   - sobbing, asking the parent for the toy back
   - distressed by having to wait

3 - child is upset by the toy being removed
   - child doesn't cry but might perhaps whimper
   - child requests parent to get the toy
   - somewhat distressed by having to wait

2 - child is mildly distressed by the toy's removal
   - child requests for toy back but not upset by the request to wait
   - mildly bothered by having to wait for toy

1 - child is not bothered or distressed by the toy's removal
   - child begins another activity
   - not bothered at all by having to wait for the toy