

The Socialization of Aggression in Boys and Men



Theory, Research, and the Potential for Change

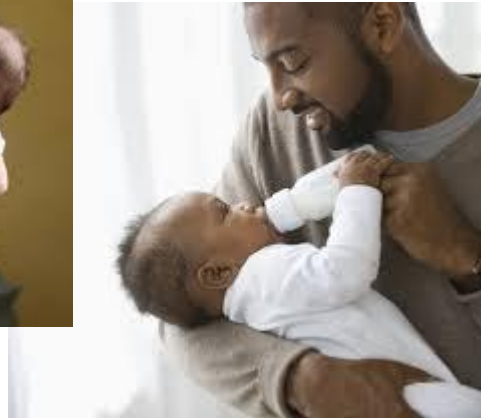
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Agenda

- ☞ Emotion regulation in early development
- ☞ Anger & aggression in early development
- ☞ Male gender socialization
- ☞ Family violence
- ☞ Parenting with an emphasis on fathers



Attachment



Attachment:

Relationship-based regulation

(Bowlby & Ainsworth)

- ∞ The early attachment relationship represents an interpersonal regulatory system – children regulate their emotions and behaviors within the relationship in order to stay connected to the caregiver
- ∞ Children form attachments to their mothers and their fathers during infancy and early childhood (Lamb, 1997)
- ∞ However, the father-child attachment relationship has received much less empirical attention. There is some evidence that the father-child attachment relationship may be especially important for boys (Schoppe-Sullivan, et al., 2006)
- ∞ [Secure] In a healthy early attachment (caregiving) relationship, the infant/young child can express all authentic emotions and count on a sensitive response from their caregiver

Attachment

(Bowlby & Ainsworth)

- ∞ [Ambivalent] In early relationships where the expression of emotion is inconsistently responded to by the caregiver, the infant learns to heighten the expression of negative emotions – these children may be described as ‘clingy’ or ‘whiny’ and negative emotions are expressed frequently
 - These kinds of behaviors can be experienced as unpleasant to other caregivers, teachers, etc.
- ∞ [Avoidant] In early relationships where the expression of emotion leads to rejection from the caregiver, the infant learns to inhibit the expression of negative emotions
 - Sroufe and colleagues (2005) found that these children, while seeming to be emotionally well-regulated would inflict aggression on other children covertly

Attachment

(Bowlby & Ainsworth; Main & Solomon)

- ∞ [Disorganized] Some parents – usually because they have endured their own horrific trauma exposure – are unable to respond to their children in an organized, predictable manner and sometimes display frightening and bizarre behaviors toward their children. For these children, the parent is at once the source of comfort and of fear.
- ∞ There is some evidence that, in high risk contexts, boys are more likely to display disorganized attachment behaviors and to react differently than girls to frightening maternal behaviors (Lyons-Ruth, et al., 1999; Carlson et al., 1989; David & Lyons-Ruth, 2005).

Emotion Regulation

- ∞ The *attachment relationship* is the primary context for the development of emotion regulation...

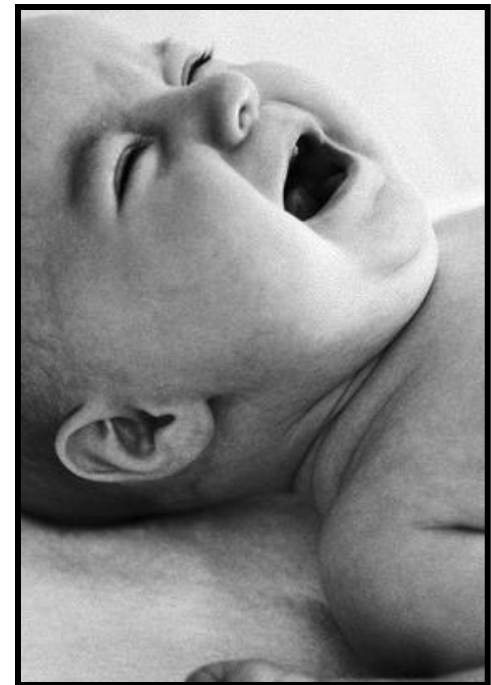


Emotion Regulation

- ∞ Emotion regulation, the ability to modulate the expression of emotion in response to the environment OR the capacity to use information in the environment to modulate emotion, is a critical early skill developing in toddlerhood that underscores all areas of development.
- ∞ Emotion regulation develops in the context of family processes: *co-regulation*.
- ∞ Even for very young boys, as early as infancy, their lower competence in emotion regulation may contribute to the increased the likelihood for conflict in primary parent relationships (Weinberg, Tronick, Cohn, & Olson, 1999).

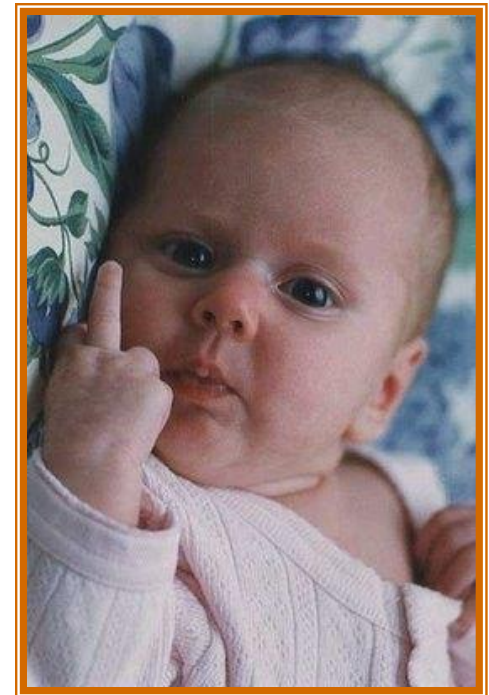
Early Emotional Development

- ∞ Newborn's emotional life is relatively undifferentiated
- ∞ Two global arousal states
 - Attraction to pleasant stimulation
 - Withdrawal from unpleasant stimulation.
- ∞ Over time, emotions become clear, well-organized signals.



Anger

- Newborns show only generalized **distress**
- **Angry** expressions increase in frequency and intensity from 4-6 months into the second year
- Cognitive and motor development both contribute to the increase in angry reactions with age.
- Anger is adaptive – defend themselves, overcome obstacles



Anger

∞ Anger

- A reaction to interference of goal directed behavior
- Theoretically, anger (vs. global distress) is present only when the infant understands action/outcome or means/end relationships - around 4 months of age (Lewis, 2010)

∞ Rage – intense anger, develops later

- “[a result of]. . . serious intense **psychological wounding or injury to the person’s feelings** . . . [often] a response to shame.”
(Lewis, 2010, p. 175)

∞ In families struggling with contextual and interpersonal risk, anger and rage tend to be more common and add to the chaotic early home environments of young children.

∞ Boys may look to their fathers as models for how to cope with frustration and how to express anger.

Biological Contributions for Boys

- ☞ Dr. Schore's talk on Thursday: Male infants are less biologically prepared to deal with stress
 - Slower development of the right hemisphere in boys vs. girls
- ☞ Delayed physical maturation and language development in boys (Zahn-Waxler, 2008)
- ☞ Cerebral maturation in infancy is slower in boys (Taylor, 1969)
- ☞ Female infants more adept at facial processing (McClure, 2000)
- ☞ Increased stress in response to separation in boys (Kunzler, 2015)



Aggression

- ✎ Aggression is normative in early childhood for both boys and girls – it peaks between the ages of 2 and 4 years with subsequent declines for most children (Tremblay & Nagin, 2005)
- ✎ More boys, however maintain these high levels of aggression compared to girls
- ✎ By preschool there is another shift – girls begin to show more relational aggression vs. the physical aggression more frequently displayed by boys (Crick, et al., 2006)



Externalizing Behaviors

- ∞ Aggression is a subset of *externalizing behavior*
- ∞ Externalizing behaviors become increasingly more apparent in boys compared to girls beginning in early toddlerhood (Keiley, Lofthouse, Bates, Dodge, & Pettit, 2003; Lunkenheimer, Olson, Hollenstein, Sameroff & Winter, 2011)
- ∞ Externalizing behaviors normatively peak in toddlerhood and then decline by school entry
- ∞ Research demonstrates a “perfect storm” in toddlerhood of negative parenting and poor emotion regulation along with contextual disparities like poverty creating stress contribute to non-normative stability in externalizing behaviors
 - Boys at greatest risk based on maternal psychopathology (McGinnis, Bocknek, Beeghly Rosenblum, & Muzik, 2015)

Gender Socialization

- ∞ Parental understanding of and reactions to temperamental and physiological qualities in their young children may be gendered
 - Mothers were found to overestimate boys' motor abilities and underestimate girls' at 11 months of age despite equality in actual abilities (Mondschein, et al., 2000)
 - Mothers respond differently to their "difficult" daughters than to their "difficult" sons despite equality on independent assessments of temperament (Maccoby, et al., 1984)
 - Fathers more likely to attend to girls' submissive emotions in early childhood but boys' disharmonious emotions (Chaplin, Cole, Zahn-Waxler, 2005)

Display Rules

Social norms that dictate the display of emotions

- ∞ Acceptable emotional expression in many U.S. and European cultures (Brody, 2000)
 - Women/Girls – sadness, depression & fear
 - Men/Boys – anger, aggression
- ∞ Physical aggression in childhood
 - Aggressive boys more likeable (Hart, et al., 1993)
 - Aggressive girls less so (Crick, 1997)
- ∞ Putting on a happy face
 - Young girls better able to appear happy even when they are not compared to young boys (Cole, 1986; Davis, 1995)
- ∞ Display Rules are modeled and/or reinforced by: Parents, peers, other adults, the media, etc.
 - They are assumed, unconscious, etc., but ever-present nonetheless

Gender socialization and aggression across the lifespan

- ☞ “Boy Code” – Gender role stress theory posits that boys are socialized to inhibit the expression of vulnerable emotions and often fall short of this goal, leading to negative outcomes including aggression (Pollack, 1998, 2006; Pleck, 1995)
- ☞ Higher ratings on measures of masculine gender identity have been associated with increased aggression (Cohn & Zeichner, 2006).
- ☞ Increases in gender role stress are associated with increases in intimate partner violence
- ☞ Due, in part, to fewer verbal skills in early development and an environmental push to restrict emotional expression, some boys may resort to aggression

Gendered Violence

- ∞ Violence is socialized differently for males & females
(Herman, 1992)
 - Males: War, defense of home/family/etc.
 - Females: Interpersonal violence – rape/partner violence/etc.
- ∞ Domestic Violence / Intimate Partner Violence
 - The gendered nature of domestic violence
 - Boys: Identification with the aggressor
 - Boys: Effects of modeling - social learning theory



Multiple pathways

- ∞ There are multiple pathways that may lead to the increased expression of aggression and violence that we see in boys/men vs. girls/women.
- ∞ Biological differences
- ∞ Parenting differences
- ∞ Socialization differences
- ∞ Differential responses to risky environments

Research at Wayne State University



Preliminary Results

TEDY

(Investigators: Bocknek, Dayton, Trentacosta, Luca, Brophy-Herb, Beeghly)

Toddlers' Emotional Development in Young Families

∞ 72 triads, 24-30 month old children

- 89% African American
- 68% Biological Fathers
- 83% of the sample earned as a family less than \$20,000 in recent 12 months
- Married biological parents: 16%
- Parents: 50% likely above cutoff for PTSD symptoms and 95% above CESD clinical cut-off
- Children: 50% Boys;
79% born 37-40 weeks gestation;
75% above CBCL cutoff



TEDY

- ∞ Boys demonstrate greater distress in response to frustrating task and higher risk in physiologic regulation at baseline ($t=2.05, p=.04$).
- ∞ Problems for boys exacerbated in the context of maternal PTSD ($t=2.31, p=.02$).

Activities meant to structure and optimize child and family resilience traits may be important for helping boys improve self-regulation of distress

- ∞ *Family rituals* serve as a resilience factor for all children, predicting better emotion regulation, and appears to be particularly salient for boys ($F=9.47, p=.00, \Delta R^2=.45; \beta=-.25, p=.02$).
- ∞ Fathers' active play supports the development of emotion regulation, particularly for children with difficult temperament (Bocknek, Dayton, Brophy-Herb, Fitzgerald, & Raveau, *In Press*).

TEDY

∞ *What do you do to help your son with anger?*

*Father: “ Just try to talk to him, say “are you awright?”, try to get his mind off of it. Probably the same thing as his mother, but not the same extend, because that’s his mother and she is nurturing, and you know, I am a little sensitive, but **I don’t want to be too sensitive to my son**, you know what I am saying, but I am sensitive to his needs and emotions.”*

Meta-Emotion Interview,
(Katz & Gottman, 1986)

TEDY

∞ *What do you want to teach your son about anger?*

Mother: "If it's handled the wrong way, the consequences could be very very major for you. You will make the wrong decision and you will have to live with it for the rest of your life. When you make a decision, think it all the way through, because they are just feelings, and they are not forever, they will come and go."

Meta-Emotion Interview,
(Katz & Gottman, 1986)

Baby-on-Board: The Wayne State University Early Parenting Study

- ☞ Carolyn Dayton, PI
- ☞ Primary Collaborators: Erika Bocknek, Sue Brown, Maria Muzik, Archana Basu, Cecilia Martinez-Torteya, Tova Walsh, Wendy Matthews

- ☞ 50 mothers and 50 fathers
- ☞ 3rd trimester of pregnancy
- ☞ Not necessarily in a romantic relationship
- ☞ Bio/Psycho/Social data collection

- ☞ Fathers
 - 59% African American, 26% Caucasian
 - 45% age 18-25
 - 33% unemployed
 - ~50% living below the poverty line
 - 46% have been arrested



Interview

**20 Questions, Embedded in a larger interview,
Adapted from an Interview used in Early Head
Start** (Fitzgerald, et al., unpublished measure)

- ∞ What does being a “good father” mean to you?
- ∞ What activities do you think are the most important when it comes to being a father?
- ∞ When you need help or support or if you have a question about your child or parenting, who do you turn to now during the pregnancy?

Being There

- ∞ I will **be there**, no matter what. No matter if I'm the brokest person in the world I will be there. And that was his [this man's father's] excuse, he said he wasn't there because he didn't have finances. But that aint no excuse to me.
- ∞ [The most important thing is] **being there** - me being there the whole time, and I'm gonna be there the whole time. And I'm proud of myself for actually coming to this. **I've never done anything like this in my whole life.**

Fathering Roles Related to Parenting Older Children

- ∞ Teach him how to play video games (laughs) you know uh you know just havin' talks and preparing, you know, **preparing him for different like steps of life, different ages** you know, havin' certain talks about certain things, I guess just like readying him [for life]
- ∞ Continuing to be there in my child's life, being there if my daughter has questions. . . I'll be there - well, if she needs help - **I'll be there to help, give my advice, pick her up when she falls, be around when she calls, all that other stuff.**

Thank You!

