1997

The effects of family expressiveness on perceived control and use of emotions in parenting situations.

Jody Deborah Levenbach

University of Windsor

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THE EFFECTS OF FAMILY EXPRESSIVENESS ON PERCEIVED CONTROL AND
USE OF EMOTIONS IN PARENTING SITUATIONS

by

Jody Levenbach

B.A.H., University of Windsor, 1990

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies

through the Department of Psychology in Partial Fulfillment

of the Degree of Master of Arts at the

University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario, Canada

1997
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Abstract

The relationship between expressiveness in the family of origin and emotion rules was examined in the context of a parenting situation. Twenty-two fathers and sixty-two mothers described a recent stressful incident with one of their children. Measures of negative and positive emotional expressiveness in parents’ families of origin were related to their perceived expression, control, and strategic use of their emotions during the stressful incident. As predicted, the frequency of positive expressiveness in parents’ families of origin was not related to their reported experience, expression, and control of negative emotions. Also as expected, parents with family backgrounds higher in the expression of negative affect tended to report greater experiences and expressions of negative affect during the stressful incident. Unexpectedly, negative expressiveness in parents’ families of origin was not associated with their perceived emotional control during the stressful incident, nor with their reported purposeful use of emotions during that time. Results were discussed in terms of the potential influence of negative family expressiveness in parents’ childhood on their emotions during stressful situations with their own children.
DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my best friend and husband, Yosh, who is my inspiration to chart unknown waters and my reason to come home.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the process of observing and interacting with others, children internalize rules about emotion that determine what types of emotional reactions are appropriate in various situations. Emotion rules that have been learned during childhood may be reflected in the experience, expression, and regulation of emotions in adulthood (Halberstadt, 1991; Shore, 1994). These emotion rules are applied in a variety of contexts, including parenting situations. Therefore, socialization of emotion is likely to have a cyclical effect, with parents bringing rules of emotion adopted from their own families to parenting situations with their children.

Halberstadt (1991) has suggested that one influence on adult emotions is the emotional expressiveness of one’s family of origin. Some families tend to promote a great deal of emotional expression, while others discourage it. These differences in family environment have been linked to adults’ differential self-expressiveness, attitudes surrounding emotional expression, and abilities in sending and interpreting emotional messages (Halberstadt, Cassidy, Stifter, Parke, & Fox, 1995).

Studies on the effects of family expressiveness have tended to focus on overt behaviours such as expressive skill in an emotion-provoking situation (see Halberstadt, 1991, for a review). However, few to date have examined individuals’ perceptions of their behaviour in an emotion-provoking situation. Furthermore, few studies in the parenting literature have directly examined the relationship between parents’ emotional interactions with their children and the emotions expressed in their families of origin. Therefore, the present study was designed to examine the connection between the
emotional expressiveness of parents’ families of origin and their rules of emotional expressiveness and control. In particular, the study will examine family expressiveness in relation to parents’ perceived emotional control and to their strategic use of emotion during a stressful parenting situation.

Family expressiveness can be measured in terms of the frequency of overall expressiveness (i.e., high or low), or the type of emotion expressed (i.e., positive or negative, submissive or dominant, Halberstadt, 1991). Each of these characteristics may have differential effects on the way parents respond emotionally to their child in a stressful situation. Most studies have chosen to examine the level of overall expressiveness in the family, rather than examining types of expressiveness separately. However, many studies in the parenting literature have examined the detrimental effects of negative family expressivity on adult outcomes such as depression (Cummings & Davies, 1994; Plutchik, 1993), suggesting that the type of emotion expressed also plays an important role in emotional socialization. Thus the current study will consider the frequency of both positive and negative expressions of emotion in parents’ family backgrounds.

Socialization of Emotional Expressiveness

Although innate factors such as temperament are involved in emotional development, researchers are increasingly focusing on the socialization of emotions and emotional expression (Halberstadt, 1991; Saarni, 1993). While peer, school, and cultural factors are also involved in the socialization process, the family provides the first context in which children learn about emotions. In the course of interacting with other family members, children learn to recognize and label subjective feelings of emotion, as well as
develop a style of communicating these emotions to others (Halberstadt, 1991). Family members may influence emotional development directly through labeling, interpreting and teaching, or may indirectly influence the process by modeling emotional expressions that are considered appropriate for that family (Halberstadt, 1991; Saarni, 1985). In the process of developing these abilities, children are thought to internalize “emotion rules”: rules to govern when it is appropriate to experience, control, and express their emotions (Hochschild, 1979; Saarni, 1993).

Averill (1983) categorized these emotion rules into three types, constitutive, regulative and heuristic. He suggested that these rules are carried into adulthood, although they may be continually modified, and provide people with a basis for appropriate feelings and behaviour in emotion-laden situations. *Constitutive* rules deal with the nature of particular emotions and their appropriateness in specific contexts; for example, the extent to which anger would be considered appropriate when one’s child is late for dinner. *Regulative* rules focus on the way that particular emotions should be expressed or controlled. Using the same example, regulative rules would determine whether the parent screamed at the child, mildly criticized, or ignored the situation. Finally, *heuristic* rules involve the strategic use of emotions, which govern a person’s beliefs about the purpose or usefulness of a particular emotion. For example, heuristic rules would influence a parent’s decision to use anger as a tool to tell the child that a certain behaviour was unacceptable. Parents with different heuristic emotion rules might also consider guilt or sadness appropriate to influence their children’s behaviour. Similarly, heuristic rules might determine how the parent used emotions to cope with a stressful situation (e.g., by deliberately calming oneself before over-reacting).
Halberstadt’s Theory of Emotional Expressiveness within the Family

A potential influence on the socialization of emotion rules is the type of emotional expressions that a child experiences within the family. Halberstadt (1991) suggests that family expressiveness affects not only one's self-expressiveness, but one's ability to send emotional messages, and even the deliberateness with which emotions are used. She defines *emotional expressions* as behaviours which suggest that a person is experiencing an emotional state. Emotional expressions can be verbal or nonverbal, conscious or unconscious, and spontaneous or feigned. Emotional expressions may also be considered either positive or negative, and either dominant or submissive. Positive expressions involve emotions that are considered to be subjectively pleasant, such as happiness or pride, while negative expressions involve emotions considered to be subjectively unpleasant, such as anger or fear. Dominant emotional expressions are those in which the person is in a superior position; for example, when showing forgiveness or contempt. Submissive emotional expressions are those in which the person is in an inferior or neutral position, such as in complimenting someone or in sulking.

Halberstadt (1991) further defines *expressiveness* as a persistent pattern that a person adopts of exhibiting emotional behaviour over many situations. The emotion that a person may feel or express at a particular moment is determined by a large number of situational factors such as the goals of the situation and likelihood of success (Stein, Triabasso, & Liwag, 1993). However, there is a great deal of consistency in the way people express or suppress their emotions throughout their life and over various situations (Halberstadt et al., 1995). This consistency can be considered the basis for an individual’s self-expressiveness. People are able to identify their own self-
expressiveness, which has been shown to correspond to the opinion of a family member or friend (Burrowes & Halberstadt, 1987).

Halberstadt (1991) suggests that the family as a whole can be thought to have a general style of expressing emotions. Family expressiveness is defined as the predominant style of exhibiting nonverbal and verbal emotional expressions within a family (Halberstadt, 1991). In some families, displays of emotion are common and encouraged; in other families emotion is not as strongly expressed, and family members are discouraged or even punished for displays of emotion that are considered "excessive". Naturally, there are differences in the expressiveness of individual family members. However, Halberstadt (1991) argues that families tend to differ from one another in the extent to which emotions are generally expressed among family members. To support her claim, she has noted that people ordinarily do not have difficulty in providing an overall rating of family expressiveness, and that family members are highly consistent in their assessments of the construct (Halberstadt et al., 1995). She has developed a 40-item questionnaire, the Family Expressiveness Questionnaire (Halberstadt, 1983), which provides the basis for her studies.

According to Halberstadt (1983), family expressiveness has a number of characteristics. First, the frequency of emotions expressed in a family may vary, so that family expressiveness may be high or low. Some families are characterized by frequent emotional expressions in a variety of contexts, while other families avoid expressions of emotion. Second, the type of emotions expressed in the family may vary. For example, families differ in the relative frequency of positive and negative expressions of emotion. The frequency of each type of emotional expression appears to be independent within a
family, such that a family highly expressive of negative emotions is not necessarily more likely to be highly expressive of positive emotions as well (Burrowes & Halberstadt, 1987).

According to Halberstadt (1986), one's own expressiveness can be considered as a communication style that is adopted through experience with the interactions, norms, and values of one's referent group, particularly the family. Children appear to adopt the expressive styles of their parents. During the early stages of life, it appears that infants' emotional reactions are related to those of their mothers. For example, three and six-month old infants demonstrated emotional expressions similar to that of their parents, with older infants resembling their mothers to a greater extent than did the younger ones (Malatesta & Haviland, 1982). Similarly, Camras et al. (1990) found that young children displayed happy expressions at a rate similar to that of their parents, in both laboratory and home settings. Children display similar emotional styles to their parents even when the parent is not present, suggesting that the expressiveness has been internalized (Halberstadt, Fox, & Jones, 1993).

Research suggests that similarities between family expressiveness and individuals' self-expressiveness continue into adulthood. Balswick and Avertt (1977), and Halberstadt, Tesh, and Hoeft (1989; cited in Halberstadt, 1991) found that college students' ratings of their own and family's expressiveness were similar. Furthermore, observations of college students' displays of emotions were related to their perceptions of their own family's emotional expressiveness (Halberstadt, 1986).
The Effects of Family Expressiveness on Expressing and Interpreting Emotions

The effect of family expressiveness on emotions is not limited to personal expressiveness. Research by Halberstadt suggests that people with high and low family expressiveness have differential abilities in clearly expressing emotion and in understanding the emotions of others (see Halberstadt, 1991, for review).

First, Halberstadt proposes that emotional expressiveness in one's family of origin affects a person's ability to send affective messages in adulthood. Skill in sending spontaneous affective messages appears to be greater in people from highly expressive families. In an observational study with college students, Halberstadt (1986) found that people from families with high expressiveness are themselves more expressive, and tend to send clearer affective messages. Students were videotaped during a five-minute conversation with other participants about happy or sad topics. Independent raters observed these interactions in videotapes without sound, and recorded the students' emotional expressions. Students from highly expressive families were found not only to be more facially expressive than those from families that were less expressive, but their expressions were also more easily interpreted by the raters. That the positive relationship between family expressiveness and sending skill remained even when the effects of self-expressiveness were statistically removed, suggests that family expressiveness independently affects skill in emotional expression. That is, people from families with a high frequency of expressiveness tend to express their emotion less ambiguously than those from families with less expressiveness, regardless of their level of self-expressiveness.
Halberstadt suggested that, because people from families high in expressiveness are exposed to a great deal of emotional expression, they tend to feel that strong emotional expression is appropriate. Therefore, they are more likely than people from families with low expressiveness to express their emotions freely. Because people from highly expressive families were encouraged to express their emotions as children, and because they observed strong emotional displays from others, they became more skillful in natural displays of their emotion. Thus, their emotions in adulthood tend to be more easily discernible than those of people from less expressive families.

While individuals from families with high expressiveness are more skilled at sending clear spontaneous emotional messages, some research suggests that people from families with low expressiveness may be more skilled at deliberate emotional expression, although the evidence is still unclear. One study did find some measures of participants' emotional expressiveness of voice tone in a posed-emotion situation to be positively correlated with two measures of family expressiveness (Halberstadt, 1983). However, a more comprehensive study using visual as well as vocal measures of affect found opposite results (Halberstadt, 1986). Participants were asked to express various emotions in a videotaped conversation with a confederate. Individuals from families with low expressiveness were able to send most emotions more accurately, suggesting a greater skill in posed sending. Individuals from highly expressive families were less accurate in most of the posed sending situations, but had a relative advantage with some of the more difficult ones. Again, these results were maintained when the effects of self-expressiveness were statistically removed. This finding suggests that low family
expressiveness is directly related to individuals' abilities to feign emotions they do not feel, regardless of their personal levels of expressiveness.

Halberstadt (1991) sought to explain her results in posed sending studies by noting that children from families with low expressiveness may have been taught to avoid strong displays of emotion in a number of circumstances. Because they were required to maintain emotional expressions at a level appropriate to the family, children from families that were less expressive would need to adapt their emotional displays to be acceptable as well as understood. Halberstadt (1986) further notes: “Individuals from high-expressive homes...are more free to express their emotions. Because they don’t have to control the quantity or refine the quality of their sending, they may not develop the precise skills required for posed sending.” (p.835) Related research provides support for the connection between lower family expressiveness and clearer deliberate displays of emotion. Friedman and Miller-Herringer (1991) examined college students involved in an emotionally-engaging task. They found that people from more highly expressive families had more difficulty than people from families with low expressiveness in deliberately controlling their expressive behaviors.

In addition to having an advantage in the deliberate expression of emotion, people from families with low expressiveness have been found to be more skilled at interpreting the emotions of others. Halberstadt (1984) measured judging skill of college students to displays of vocal, facial, or bodily expressions. A total of 223 participants viewed slides, photos, or videotaped people displaying a variety of emotions. In each of the six small studies, participants from families with low expressiveness were more skilled at recognizing the emotions than were participants from more highly expressive homes.
Halberstadt suggested that people from families where expression is low need to become more sensitive than those from highly expressive families in interpreting the emotional cues of others, and therefore become more skilled in judging emotions.

To summarize these findings, research suggests that people who grow up with a great deal of emotional expression learn to express emotions clearly and spontaneously, but may be less able to control their emotional displays. They are more spontaneously expressive, but may not be as able to deliberately manipulate their emotional expressions. On the other hand, individuals raised in households where emotions are not expressed in an obvious way must become adept at reading subtle signs of emotion in others and of channeling their emotional experiences into avenues acceptable to their family. Therefore, they may develop a greater control over their emotional expressions, and may be better able to read the emotional cues of others.

Halberstadt (1986) suggested that “it may be that participants low in family expressiveness are more economical and concise in their messages owing to the inhibitions placed on the intensity of their expression, whereas participants high in family expressiveness are emoting instead of thinking clearly about how to encode the communication.” (p.835).

Differences in Attitudes towards the Expression of Emotions

In addition to behavioural differences in emotion-provoking situations, there may be differences between individuals from high and low expressive families in their attitudes towards expressing certain emotions. Halberstadt (1991) argues that people from families with low expressiveness typically have been socialized to avoid intense emotional expressions, and have therefore developed a greater ambivalence towards
strong emotional displays. People from families with high expressiveness have more experience with intense emotions, because these emotions are exhibited by family members on a frequent basis. Because a high degree of emotional expression is considered the norm in these families, people from families high in expressiveness may themselves become more accepting of emotionality. There is some empirical evidence suggesting that this is true, at least for negative emotions. In a study of anger in college students and adults (Burrowes & Halberstadt, 1987), college students and members of their family completed questionnaires about their family expressiveness, personal expressiveness, and experiences of anger. Students who reported greater family expressiveness also tended to report a greater desire to express anger, as well as greater experiences of anger, when compared to students from less expressive families.

In addition, questionnaire results indicated that college students from families with low expressiveness were more ambivalent about expressing their true emotions than those from highly expressive families (King & Emmons, 1990). Forty-eight college students completed the Family Expressive Questionnaire and a questionnaire designed by the authors to measure ambivalence towards expressed emotion. Ambivalence to expressed emotions was measured by participants’ agreement to statements like “I feel guilty after I have expressed anger to someone” and “I can recall a time when I wish that I had told someone how much I really care about them”. Students with lower ratings of family expressiveness had greater ratings of ambivalence towards their emotional expression.

Although Halberstadt did not make an explicit connection between family expressiveness and emotion rules, her results can be conceptualized in terms of
differences in constitutive, regulative, and heuristic rules of emotion. People may have
different constitutive emotion rules for an identical situation depending on their families’
expressiveness, each person differing in the emotions thought to be appropriate. If
family expressiveness does influence the intensity of a person’s emotions, then a certain
situation might evoke elation or rage for those from highly expressive families. The same
circumstance might evoke contentment or irritation in people from less expressive
families. Similarly, regulative rules may depend on family expressiveness, with those
from highly expressive families preferring stronger displays of emotion. Finally,
heuristic rules might differ with levels of family expressiveness. Halberstadt (1986) has
suggested that people from families low in expressiveness are more likely to consciously
control their displays of emotion. It may also be that people from families low in
expressiveness use emotions in a more purposeful manner, while people from highly
expressive families have more spontaneous emotional reactions to situations.

**Frequency and Intensity of Parental Emotions.**

The studies discussed above suggest that the frequency to which emotions are
expressed in the family may be related to the extent to which people experience
emotions, to their tendency to express emotions, and to the accuracy with which they
send and interpret emotional messages. One study further suggests that frequency of
parental emotional expression influences the *types* of emotion expressed by children in
the family. Halberstadt et al. (1993) found that the frequency of mothers’ emotional
expressions was related to the negativity of emotional expressions their children tended
to display. Six-year old children were observed speaking about happy, sad, and fearful
topics in the laboratory and school settings. In both settings, children with mothers who
were high in expressiveness tended to be more expressive of negative emotions, while children whose mothers were low in expressiveness were more expressive of positive emotions.

The results of Halberstadt et al. (1993) provide further evidence that frequency of parental expressiveness influences their children's emotional development. The authors posit that extremely high levels of parental negative affect may dampen a child's positive expressiveness. The findings can be extended to the influence of family expressiveness on children as they reach adulthood, and become parents themselves. If one's expressiveness remains relatively stable until adulthood, then parents who grew up in homes with high levels of family expressiveness may be more negatively expressive themselves.

Related studies support the notion that frequency of emotional expression in the family is associated with an individual's emotional development, and can be detrimental at extremely high or low levels. Parents' levels of emotional expressiveness at either extreme have been linked with a variety of negative outcomes in children. For example, evidence from parents who are depressed, unresponsive, or psychologically unavailable suggests that a low degree of emotional expressiveness is associated with avoidant attachments in infants (Egeland & Farber, 1984), as well as later psychopathology (Kaslow, Deering, & Racusin, 1994). In terms of extremely high levels of emotional expression, research in child development indicates that children who are exposed to a great deal of parental negative affect appear to have more socio-emotional difficulties, including a greater tendency towards aggressive behaviour (Boyum & Parke, 1995). However, the effects of extremely high levels of positive parental affect are still unclear.
Differences between the effects of positive and negative parental affect are discussed in
the following section.

Like their expression of emotion, the extent to which parents experience emotions
can be an important influence on their children’s emotional development. Because
emotions can act as powerful motivators of behaviour (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988),
emotions that are experienced at too low a level might inhibit the parent from coping
with parenting situations in an appropriate manner. Conversely, extreme experiences of
emotion may disrupt a parent’s ability to monitor and control affective situations, to
problem solve, and to reason clearly about conflict situations (Vasta, 1982).

Moderate levels of parental affect and expression appear to be associated with the
most positive outcomes in children (Dix, 1991). In addition, other characteristics of
parental emotions are likely as important as emotional frequency and intensity. Many
studies have noted that characteristics such as warmth, consistency, and clarity of
parents’ emotions are all important influences on children’s emotional development
(Boyum & Parke, 1995).

The Effects of Positive versus Negative Parental Affectivity

Emotions have traditionally been divided in psychological research in terms of
their “positive” and “negative” attributes, with emotions such as joy and happiness
characterized as positive, and emotions such as sadness, anger and fear characterized as
negative. Some models of emotion posit that infants are born with two or more basic
emotional states at birth, which develop into differentiated emotions as they get older
(Buck, 1988). Emotions considered positive, such as joy, are thought to derive from the
basic emotional state of contentment or satiety, while emotions considered negative, such
as anger and fear are thought to derive from the basic emotional state of distress (Lewis, 1993).

The characterization of an emotion as negative does not imply that the emotion itself is of little value, or that the outcome of a negative emotion will be unfavorable. All emotions, both positive and negative, are assumed to have developed to ensure human's adaptation to experiences and ultimate survival (e.g., Buck, 1988). For example, it is necessary for individuals to experience fear to protect them from dangerous experiences. Expression of negative emotion is often necessary to communicate relevant information to others (Ekman, 1984; Halberstadt, 1991), and is thought to be related to mental health (King & Emmons, 1990). What makes an emotion negative is its relationship to goal-directed behaviour and the pleasantness or unpleasantness of accompanying subjective experiences (Stein et al., 1993). Emotions that are associated with achievement of an immediate desired goal are considered "positive", while those associated with a lack of goal-attainment are considered "negative".

Research suggests that positive and negative family expressiveness have differential effects on an individual's experience and expression of emotion, as well as on their perceptions of emotional control. College women from families high in negative dominant expressiveness were found to be more prone to depression than women from families less expressive of negative dominant emotion. However, women from families highly expressive of positive emotion were less depression-prone than those in families with less positive expression (Cooley, 1992). Kindergarten children whose mothers were highly expressive of negative emotion demonstrated greater amounts of aggression, but positive expressiveness did not influence aggression. Parents who were higher in
positive expressiveness had children who were more popular with their peers (Boyum & Parke, 1995). Toddlers from families that were highly expressive of positive emotion were more able to soothe themselves in times of distress, while toddlers from families highly expressive of sadness were less able to soothe themselves (Garner, 1995). Parents’ positive emotional expressions predicted their preschoolers’ positive expressiveness with their peers. However, parents’ negative affectivity predicted more aggressive acts and greater negative expressions of emotion in their preschoolers (Denham, et al., 1997).

In Burrowes’ and Halberstadt’s (1987) questionnaire study, the experience of anger as related to family expressiveness of negative emotions, but not to family expressiveness of positive emotions. No relation was found between family expression of positive affect and the expression of anger. However, participants from families with high negative expressiveness reported more personal expression of anger, and less control over their anger than participants from families with low negative expressiveness. The connection between negative family expressiveness and anger was maintained when the participants’ own self-expressiveness was partialled out. This finding suggests that negative, but not positive, emotions expressed in the home may lead to a decreased ability to control negative emotions, and to an increased tendency to express negative emotions.

Further findings of Burrowes and Halberstadt (1987) suggest that the experience of anger may be greater for those who have been raised in homes that are highly expressive of negative emotion than those raised in homes where anger is rarely expressed. Participants from families high in negative expressiveness reported greater
intensity of anger, and a longer duration of anger, than those from families low in negative expressiveness. These findings were consistent when information was gathered from the participants themselves, as well as from a friend or family member of the participant. Positive family expressiveness was not related to any measures of the participants’ reported experiences of anger. Again, the effects of family expressiveness on experience of emotion was maintained when the effects of self-expressiveness were removed.

Halberstadt (1991) suggests that being exposed to frequent expressions of emotion may eventually cause a person to experience more intense emotions themselves. She argues that young children do not differentiate between inner emotional experiences and emotional expression. Therefore, when they model their parent’s emotional expressions, they may internalize those expressions as emotional experiences. In similar situations throughout life, people may tend to experience the emotions they witnessed expressed as a child.

Related studies support two implications of the above studies, specifically that the type of emotions expressed in the home has lasting effects, and that the frequency of negative expressiveness may be more critical in the regulation of negative emotion than the frequency of positive expressiveness. A great deal of expressed negative affect is associated with poor child outcomes, and is associated with abusive families (Dix, 1991; Vasta, 1982). Studies have shown that expressions of negative emotion are particularly contagious, and likely to result in increased conflicts with family members (Dix & Lochman, 1990). Similarly, Denham and Grout (1992) found that the degree of anger expressed by mothers is negatively related to their children’s happiness. The negative
emotional expression need not be directed to the children themselves; recent studies have found that negative affectivity between adults in the child’s company can cause emotional difficulties in the child (Katz & Gottman, 1993; Cummings & Davies, 1994). In her review of the parenting literature, Dix (1991) notes that “most researchers assume that these negative emotions both reflect dysfunctional interaction patterns and contribute to the deficits characteristic of parenting these families” (p.4).

Negative parental expressiveness that is too high or too low is detrimental, but a medium level may be optimal. A certain level of negative expressivity within the family may be necessary for children to learn how to control angry or aggressive feelings. In Boyum and Parke’s (1995) study of parents of preschoolers, clarity of negative parental affect was found to be an important determinant of the children’s social competence. While greater intensity of mothers’ negative affect predicted increased aggression in their children, mothers and fathers with high ratings in the clarity of negative affect had children who demonstrated less aggression and more pro-social behaviour. The authors suggest that highly intense displays of anger may tend to increase aggressive behaviour, but that low-level clearly-sent negative messages “may provide a model of more precise and perhaps modulated negative affect, which, in turn, provides the opportunity to learn to regulate negative affect” (Boyum & Parke, 1995, p. 606). The authors further suggested that low-level negative responses might be instructive in learning how to deal with negative emotions. They proposed that negative parental affect at high levels was more likely to be confrontational, rather than a mutually beneficial interchange between parent and child.
Many studies have pointed to the beneficial effects of positive emotions in the family. Unlike high frequencies of negative affect, studies do not suggest detrimental effects of "excessive" positive expressiveness. Warm parenting produces children who are more securely attached and empathic, and more expressive of positive affect (see Dix, 1991, for review). A high degree of positive, but not negative, family expressiveness is associated with greater peer competence in school-aged children (Cassidy, Parke, Butkovsky, & Braungart, 1992; Boyum & Parke, 1995). Similarly, children who are exposed to a greater amount of positive parental affect are more accepted by their peers, while those who are exposed to a greater amount of negative affect are less accepted (MacDonald & Parke, 1984). Positive and neutral expression of parental emotion are associated with a higher self-esteem in adolescent girls, and greater peer popularity with adolescent boys (Bronstein, Fitzgerald, Briones, Piendiaz, & D'Ari, 1993).

Studies such as these suggest that type of emotional expression is as important to the socialization of emotion as its frequency. They further suggest that the frequency of negative expressiveness within the family may play an important role in a person's expression and control of negative emotion. However, frequency of positive parental expressiveness has not generally been found to relate to children's experience and expression of negative emotion, except in cases where positive emotion is severely limited, as with maternal depression. The negative outcome associated with children of depressed mothers suggests that a minimum level of parental positive expressiveness is necessary for a child's adequate control of negative emotions. But parents' expression of
positive emotion that exceeds a necessary level may be less important to their children's emotional development than is their negative emotional expression.

The Use of Coping Strategies

In addition to influencing emotional experiences and expressions, parents' family expressiveness may also modify their coping strategies. As Folkman and Lazarus (1988) argue, coping strategies mediate affect during stressful incidents by allowing the person to consciously reduce their emotions, or by effecting a change in the situation to one that evokes more positive emotions. Therefore, the methods that parents use to cope with stressful situations with their children are influenced by, and have an effect on, their emotions.

Two inter-related types of coping have been identified which involve the regulation of emotion or the emotion-producing environment (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988). One type of coping strategy is emotion-focused coping. Emotion-focused coping involves efforts to reduce the emotional discomfort in stressful situations through actions or thoughts designed to purposefully change one's emotions. Some examples of this type of coping response are re-appraising the situation in a positive light, distancing oneself from the situation, or seeking social support. A second type of coping strategy is problem-focused coping, which involves regulating the emotionally arousing situation directly. Making plans to solve the problem and confronting people associated with the stressful situation are two examples of problem-focused coping. Both types of coping are thought to be effective if appropriate for the situation, and the use of a wide variety of potential coping strategies is usually associated with the most positive outcome (Zeidner & Saklofske, 1996).
Selection of certain coping strategies, particularly emotion-focused coping strategies, can control changes in affective experience and expression. For example, parents who distance themselves from the problem or re-appraise the situation positively can reduce extreme negative affect. This can keep emotions at a level where parents are able to make organized responses to incidents with their children. If emotions are at a manageable level, the parent may be in a better position to engage in planful problem solving.

Dix (1991) argues that a skill necessary to successful parenting is the ability to keep reactions to negative emotion at a controlled level in order to respond appropriately. A parent whose affect is uncontrollable may either confront the child in a forceful way, or avoid the situation. Dix (1991) suggests that forceful strategies suppress a child’s wants rather than reconcile them with the parents, so the parent will be more likely to encounter resistance. Reliance primarily on forceful coping strategies has the potential to promote incompatible behaviour and therefore negative affect from the parents (Dix, 1991).

Effects of Parent and Child Characteristics on Parental Emotions

As suggested by the previous studies, the frequency and type of emotions that individuals encountered while growing up can affect their emotional development, and ultimately influence the way they experience and express emotions as adults. Therefore, parents’ family expressiveness may be an important determinant of emotional interchanges with their children. However, characteristics of the parent and child can also make significant contributions.
There is some evidence for emotional differences in men and women, although many studies suggest that these differences are small. Although women have been found to be more ambivalent about expressing their true feelings (King & Emmons, 1990), many studies suggest that women tend to be more expressive of emotions in general (Brody & Hall, 1993). On the other hand, some studies have found no difference in the extent to which men and women express negative emotions (Averill, 1982; King & Emmons, 1990).

Most studies suggest that women report greater experiences of positive affect, as well as inward-directed emotions such as sadness and fear; men report greater experiences of anger (Brody & Hall, 1993). However, greater anger experiences have also been reported in women (Fujita, Diener, & Sandvik, 1991). There may also be a difference in the type of emotion that men and women are more skilled in communicating. Halberstadt (1986) found that men were more accurate in expressing sad information, while women were more accurate in expressing happy information. In their review of the literature on gender and emotion, Brody and Hall (1993) suggest that many sex differences can be attributed to differences in situational factors and cultural expectations, rather than constitutional differences in expression or experience.

In addition to gender differences in the emotions of adults, the sex and age of the child can also affect parents’ emotional reactions. Research suggests that parents express a greater variety of emotions to their daughters than to their sons, and that parents express more negative and fewer positive emotions to their sons than to their daughters (Brody & Hall, 1993). Lemerie and Dodge (1993) note that parents become less accepting of their children’s expressions of anger or aggression as the children get older.
Parents attribute a greater responsibility for undesirable behaviour to older children, making parents more likely to be angry at them (Dix, 1991).

**Rationale and Hypotheses of Present Study**

Parents’ experiences with emotions in their family of origin may affect their responses to stressful events with their own children. As discussed above, extremely high or low levels of expressiveness in individuals’ family backgrounds are associated with various aspects of their overall emotional development. Moreover, variations in individuals’ family expressiveness appear to be associated with the types of emotion they experience, the extent to which they experience these emotions, their tendency to express their emotions, and the skill with which they send and receive emotional messages. It is important to understand the implications of emotional expression in parents’ family backgrounds because parents’ emotional reactions to stressful events are important influences on their own children’s development.

In the present study, the effects of expressiveness in parents’ families’ of origin will be examined in relation to rules governing their experience, expression and strategic use of emotion during stressful incidents with their children. Data for this study will be taken from written self-reports of eighty-six parents obtained from a larger study on parenting emotion, in which parents were asked to identify and describe the most stressful incident they had recently experienced with their child. The current study will focus on responses to questions involving parents’ emotions during the described incident, their coping responses, and their emotional background.

In general, it was hypothesized that parents who were raised in families highly expressive of negative affect would not only report a greater intensity of negative
emotion during a stressful incident, but would also be more likely to report that their emotional experiences were justified. Furthermore, parents from families high in negative expressiveness are expected to perceive themselves as expressing their emotions more, controlling them less, and using their emotions as a strategy to a lesser extent, than parents from less negatively expressive families. However, positive family expressiveness is not expected to be associated with the aforementioned differences.

Specific hypotheses of the study can be interpreted in terms of differences in emotion rules.

**Hypothesis 1: Constitutive Rules**

It is believed that there will be differences in the extent to which parents experience negative emotions, and view these emotions as appropriate. Due to constitutive rules that govern the experience and appropriateness of emotions, negative emotions may be inhibited in people from less negatively expressive families. Therefore, parents from families with high negative expressiveness are expected to report a greater subjective experience of anger, fear, and sadness than those from families with low negative expressiveness.

Frequency of positive family expressiveness is not expected to be associated with greater subjective experiences of negative emotions. If there is a relation between positive family expressiveness and greater experience of negative emotion, it is most likely to be negative; parents from families with more positive expressiveness may report less intense feelings of negative emotion.

Because previous research has suggested that people from highly expressive families have less ambivalence about emotional expression, it is expected that parents
from families high in negative expressiveness will have a stronger belief that their
reported emotions were appropriate to the situation.

**Hypothesis 2: Regulative Rules**

Differences in the perception of emotional control and expression, which is
governed by regulative emotion rules, will be observed in the degree of parents’
perceived expression and control over their emotions during the stressful incident, and
whether or not parents felt justified in expressing their emotions to that extent. Previous
research has suggested that people from highly expressive families are more expressive
of emotions, and are less ambivalent about expressing their emotions (Halberstadt et al.,
1993; Halberstadt, 1991; King & Emmons, 1990). One study has suggested that people
from more highly expressive families control their anger less, and report less of a desire
to control their anger (Burrowes & Halberstadt, 1988).

It is therefore hypothesized that parents from highly negative expressive families
will report that they expressed their feelings more, and controlled them less, than parents
from families with low negative expressiveness. It is further expected that parents from
highly negative expressive families will be more likely to report that they should have
expressed and controlled their emotions, than will parents from families with low
negative expressiveness. Because the emotions experienced during the stressful incident
will be primarily negative, positive family expressiveness is not predicted to influence
reported expression and control of emotions.

**Hypothesis 3: Heuristic Rules**

Differences in emotional expression in one’s family during childhood may be
related to adults’ perceptions of the purpose or use of emotions during stressful
situations. These differences in heuristic rules may be seen in parents’ perceptions of their own use of emotions strategically. According to Halberstadt (1991), parents from families lower in expressiveness may be more skillful at deliberately expressing their emotions, and at detecting subtle nuances of emotional expression. These skills may make them more likely to perceive emotional expression as a tool to help them meet their needs. In contrast, parents from families higher in expressiveness may tend to perceive emotional expression as a spontaneous reaction that communicates their internal state. Therefore, parents from families with low negative expressiveness are expected to report a greater use of emotions as a strategy to change their child, themselves, someone else, or the situation, than will parents from highly expressive families.

According to Folkman and Lazarus (1988), certain coping strategies involve the manipulation of one’s emotions in an attempt to deal with emotion-provoking situations (i.e., emotion-focused coping) or involve the deliberate sharing of emotions with others (i.e., seeking social support). Therefore, coping strategies may be applied according to heuristic rules of emotion – rules which govern the purpose or use of emotion across various situations. Because they may perceive more control over their emotions, it is hypothesized that parents from families with low negative expressiveness will be more likely to change their attitudes and perceptions of the situation in order to deliberately alter their emotions. Therefore, they are expected to report a higher frequency than parents from families with high expressiveness of coping responses such as distancing, self-control, accepting responsibility, and positive reappraisal. However, because parents from highly expressive families are more comfortable in expressing their emotions, they may be more likely to use emotion in the context of sharing it with others than will
parents from families with low expressiveness. They are thus expected to report a greater use of seeking social support than are parents from families with low negative expressiveness. Coping strategies that specifically change the stressful situation directly are not expected to be related to family expressiveness.
CHAPTER II

METHOD

Participants

The participants for the current study were taken from those in a larger study on parenting emotions (Hakim-Larson, Dunham, Vellet, Murduca & Levenbach, 1997). See Table 1 for a summary of demographic characteristics of the sample. Twenty-four fathers (M age = 35.21, SD = 8.03) and sixty-two mothers (M age = 35.05, SD = 8.50) who were unrelated to each other were recruited from undergraduate Psychology classes at a midsize university in southwestern Ontario. Stepparents, adoptive parents, and foster parents were included. The measures given to the subjects required that one child be identified as the focus of a stressful incident to be examined in the study. The target children were chosen on the basis of age and sex, with an attempt to select an equal number of boys and girls of each age. Sons of the participants ranged in age from four months to 27 years, while daughters ranged in age from four months to 22 years.

Participants were paid a nominal fee for their participation in the study, or given course credit. Socioeconomic status, which was based on participants’ education, income and occupation, was measured according to the Blissen Scale (Blissen & McRoberts, 1976; Blissen & Carroll, 1978), and appears in Table 1.

Measures

Background Information Form. This form requests general information about the participants’ age, marital status, socio-economic status, education, religion and family background.
Table 1

Summary of Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>percent of total (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>27.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>72.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Gender&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>48.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>51.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Age&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>infant/preschool&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>30.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>childhood&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>34.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>adolescence&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>29.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>youth&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Birth Order&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>first-born</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>later-born</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>38.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship to Child&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biological Parent</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step-Parent</td>
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<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster Parent</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. <sup>a</sup> refers to target child that is the focus of the incident reported by participants;

<sup>b</sup> infant/preschool = 4 months to 5 yrs, childhood = 6 yrs to 12 yrs, adolescence = 13 yrs to 19 yrs, youth = 21 yrs to 27 yrs; <sup>c</sup> one participant did not respond

(table continues)
Table 1 (continued)

**Summary of Demographic Characteristics of the Sample**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>percent of total (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Religion</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Protestant</td>
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<td>17.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Christian - no denomination</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islamic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agnostic/Atheist</td>
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<td>10.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marital Status</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Married</td>
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<tr>
<td>Single</td>
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<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
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<td>18.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Separated</td>
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<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
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<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living Together</td>
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<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnicity(^c)</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
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<td>86.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. \(^c\) One participant did not respond.*
Table 1 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summary of Demographic Characteristics of the Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Variable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family Income</strong>&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>less than $10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$10,000 to $20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$21,000 to $30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$31,000 to $40,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$41,000 to $50,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more than $50,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some high school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduated high school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college/university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduated college/university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some work beyond</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finished graduate degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Socio-Economic Status</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>over 69.99&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-69.99&lt;sup&gt;e&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59.99&lt;sup&gt;f&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49.99&lt;sup&gt;g&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39.99&lt;sup&gt;h&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>under 30.00&lt;sup&gt;i&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* <sup>c</sup> One participant did not respond. <sup>d</sup> Includes physicians, lawyers, professors, engineers, judges, dentists, and senior officials. <sup>e</sup> Includes architects, teachers, social workers, psychologists, scientists, and counselors. <sup>f</sup> Includes managers, librarians, ministers of religion and occupational therapists. <sup>g</sup> Includes private investigators, sales occupations, adjusters, clerks, and mail carriers. <sup>h</sup> Includes mechanics, truck drivers, and specialized labourers. <sup>i</sup> Includes cashiers, general labourers, farmers, tailors, and food preparation occupations.
Family Expressiveness Questionnaire (FEQ). This self-report questionnaire (Halberstadt, 1986) consists of 40 examples of emotion expression (e.g., crying after an unpleasant disagreement; exclaiming over a beautiful day). Responses are rated on a 9-point Likert-type scale based on the frequency that respondents perceived the expressions as occurring in their family relative to other families. Total family expressiveness scores are based on the sum of individual responses, with a higher score reflecting a higher frequency of emotional expression in the home. Halberstadt (1986) designed the study to examine two dimensions positive/negative and dominant/submissive which could be combined to create four scales: positive dominance, negative dominance, positive submissive, negative submissive. The scales in this measure have been found to have an internal consistency between .75 and .88, and a retest reliability of $r (30) = .91, .92, .89$, and .91 for PS, PD, NS and ND respectively, with $p < .05$ (Halberstadt, 1986). Using the FEQ, college students’ ratings of their own family expressiveness were in agreement with those of family members ($r = .51, p < .05$) and close friends ($r = .35, p < .05$; Burrowes & Halberstadt, 1987). Discriminant validity is demonstrated by its low to moderate correlations with shyness [$r (62) = -0.49$ to $r (62) = 0.00$], and self-expressiveness [$r (67) = 0.35$ for males; $r (62) = 0.16$ for females], suggesting that these represent different but related variables (Halberstadt et al., 1995).

Ways of Coping Questionnaire (WCQ). The revised WCQ measure (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) is considered by many to be the standard in the field of coping research (see Schwarzer & Schwarz, 1996). It consists of 68 items with eight scales derived from factor analysis, which can be further reduced to two scales of emotion-focused and problem-focused coping (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988). Items are
rated using a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from “does not apply or was not used” to “used a great deal”. The eight scales with sample items are as follows (Schwarzer & Schwarzer, 1996): 1. Confrontive coping (“stood my ground and fought for what I wanted”) 2. Distancing (“went on as if nothing had happened”) 3. Self-Controlling (“I tried to keep my feelings to myself”) 4. Seeking social approval (“Talked to someone to find out more about the situation”) 5. Accepting responsibility (“Criticized or Lectured myself”) 6. Escape-Avoidance (“Hoped a miracle would happen”) 7. Planful Problem Solving (“I made a plan of action and followed it”) 8. Positive Reappraisal (“Changed or grew as a person in a good way”). The scales have been found to be relatively orthogonal, suggesting that distinct dimensions of coping are being tapped (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988). However, a criticism of the measure is that the eight factors may not be of the same weight or theoretical level, with some factors appearing closer to a general factor and others more peripheral (Schwarzer & Schwarzer, 1996). In this study, relative coping scores were used, which refer to the proportion of the total coping score accounted for by each scale (see Folkman & Lazarus, 1988).

**Parental Emotions Questionnaire.** This unpublished questionnaire was created by the first author of the larger study from which the present participants were chosen (Hakim-Larson et al., 1997). Because no appropriate measure exists to examine control of emotion rules examined in the study, selected questions were chosen that corresponded to the hypotheses in the study. All ratings are made on a 7-point Likert-type scale. Questions extracted verbatim from the original questionnaire, renumbered to correspond to Averill’s (1983) emotion rules, appear in Appendix A. The following are summaries of each question chosen for the study.
The first question was chosen to provide a rating of the intensity with which participants felt they had experienced three key negative emotions. This question asked the participants to rate the extent to which various emotions were experienced during the stressful incident, and provided a space for participants to explain their answers in their own words. In the original questionnaire, twelve specific emotions were considered. In the present study, angry, afraid, and sad were selected because they were assumed to be common in parenting situations. Each emotion was rated for three time periods: at the time, afterwards, and now. To provide a measure that accounted for changes in parents' anger over time, a weighted sum of scores across all three time periods was calculated, with at the time, afterwards, and now given the weights of 3, 2, and 1 respectively. The following calculation was intended to give greatest weight to anger experienced at the time, but simultaneously differentiate parents whose anger dissipated more quickly from those who remained angry.

Although participants provided separate answers to each question for three time periods, only the at the time was considered for the remaining questions. The rationale for limiting the time period to the time of the incident was based on participants' written responses to the question — there appeared to be inconsistencies in the way that participants' interpreted the other two time periods. (Specifically, some participants appeared to rate their responses based on their emotions at the time of the incident, while others based their responses on their emotions at the time in question.)

The second question was chosen to measure parents' sense of justification for feeling the emotions that they had reported. This question asked the participants to rate the extent to which they felt they had a right as a parent to feel the way they did.
The third question consisted of two parts, and was chosen to measure the extent to which parents felt that they had expressed their emotions at the time of the incident, and whether or not they should have expressed their emotions. Ratings of expression were based on their facial expressions, body, tone of voice or words spoken. Whether or not they should have expressed their emotions was based on a yes/no answer. The fourth question also consisted of two parts, and was chosen to measure the extent to which parents felt they had controlled their emotions. Wording of the questions was identical to those about emotional expression, with the replacement of control for expression. Again, ratings of control were based on their facial expressions, body, tone of voice or words spoken. Whether or not they should have expressed their emotions was based on a yes/no answer.

The fifth question was chosen to measure the extent to which parents were aware of their emotions as serving a purpose to them, or perceived themselves as deliberately using their emotions to meet their goals. The question asked parents to rate the extent to which they felt their feelings and reactions were part of a plan or strategy to evoke some kind of change. It was therefore intended to determine the degree that participants perceived their emotional response as being deliberately manipulated as opposed to merely reflecting an inner state.

Procedure

Participants filled out the questionnaires on an individual basis at the university. The researcher gave the questionnaires to the participants in the order described below. After the basic requirements of the study were explained and the consent form was signed, the experimenter was available to participants while they filled out the
background information form, answering questions as needed. A copy of the consent form was given to them to keep. They were then asked to think of the most stressful incident that happened to them in the past two weeks (or most recently) involving their child, and asked to write about the details of that incident on a page provided. At this time, they were given the Ways of Coping Questionnaire, read the instructions, and asked to respond to it in reference to the stressful incident which they have described. When this was completed, the experimenter gave them the Parenting Emotions Questionnaire and explained how it was to be filled out. Upon the completion of this form, the researcher gave the participant four counterbalanced questionnaires – only one of which is considered here – FEQ. The instructions for this measure emphasized that the statements were to be answered in terms of their family of origin. During the time that the questionnaires were being filled out, the participant was left alone to ensure privacy.
CHAPTER III

Results

Preliminary Analyses

To account for changes over time, single scores for each of the emotions of anger (Anger-W), fear (Afraid-W) and sadness (Sad-W) were created using weighted values for each time period. Specifically, ratings “at the time” were given a weight of three, “afterwards” received a weight of two, and “now” received a weight of one. The sum of weighted ratings at each time period was used as a measure of overall emotional experience of each emotion. Weighting the time periods in such a way allotted the greatest importance to ratings for “at the time”, while taking time differences into account.

All variables were tested for normality; five variables were transformed because they were significantly skewed. The emotion afraid was transformed into a dichotomous variable representing presence/absence (Afraid-DW), because 49% of participants reported feeling no fear at all. Due to significant negative skewness, reflections and square root transformations were performed on participants’ feelings of justification for experiencing their reported emotions (Justif-RT), and participants’ expression of emotion (Expression-RT). The coping strategies of escape-avoidance (Escav-T) and planful problem solving (Plan-T) were logarithmically transformed because they were found to be substantially positively skewed. All transformations successfully eliminated skewness. No other variables required transformation.

Total family expressiveness as measured by the FEQ was divided into two subscores: positive family expressiveness (POS) and negative family expressiveness
(NEG). The means with standard deviation in brackets of POS and NEG were 97.99 (34.54) and 109.33 (25.02) respectively. These means are comparable to values found in other studies (e.g. Cooley, 1992).

In order to control for the effects of parent and child characteristics, variables which were potentially related to NEG, POS or to the dependent variables in the study were considered. Background variables considered to potentially influence the relation between family expressiveness and the dependent variables were: parent gender (PRNTGEN), child gender (CHLDGEN), child age (CHLDAGE), and child birth order (BRTHORD). Table 2 on page 39 contains the zero-order correlations among background variables, dependent variables and the family expressiveness variables of NEG and POS. Parent age was not considered because it was highly correlated with child age (r = .80, p < .001). Two variables were included in all standard multiple regressions because they were correlated with NEG or POS at an alpha level of at least .10. Specifically, parent gender was significantly correlated with NEG, with females tending to report greater negative family expressiveness, and child age was marginally correlated with POS, with parents of younger children reporting greater positive family expressiveness. All standard multiple regression procedures also included the background variables which were correlated with the dependent variable in question at an alpha level of at least .10. Because of sample size restrictions that limit the number of predictors to be used in logistic regression procedures (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1989), only NEGEXPR was used to predict dichotomous variables.

Variable names and their meanings are found in Appendix B.
Table 2

Correlation Matrix of Background Characteristics, Dependent Variables and Family Expressiveness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
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<td>.21*</td>
<td>.09</td>
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<td>.04</td>
<td>-.31**</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05  ** p < .01  *** p < .001  ' p < .10
Hypothesis 1: Constitutive Rules

The zero order correlations of both NEG and POS with anger, sadness, and fear were examined to explore the relation between family expressiveness and negative emotion in isolation to other influences. As shown in Table 2 on page 39, NEG was significantly correlated with participants' ratings of Anger-W, while POS was not significantly correlated with any background variable.

To determine which background variables might influence the relation between negative emotions and family expressiveness, zero order correlations between the emotions of anger, sadness, and fear, and the background variables were examined. As shown in Table 1, Anger-W was marginally correlated negatively with child gender and positively with parent gender. Although not significant, the direction of the correlation suggests that both mothers and parents of boys tended to feel greater anger. Also shown in Table 2 on page 39, parent gender and child birth order were significantly correlated with Afraid-DW, with parents of later-born children and with fathers tending to report the feeling afraid. No background variable was significantly correlated with Sad-W.

To test whether family expressiveness was associated with the intensity of participants' experience of anger when the effects of other independent variables were removed, a multiple regression procedure was performed using as the independent variables NEG, POS, CHLDAGE, CHLDGEN, and PRNTGEN. The standard multiple regression predicting ratings of Anger-W was found to be significant, $F (5, 80) = 2.85, p < .05$. Table 3 contains the $R$ and Multiple $R^2$, as well as standardized beta coefficients and squared semi-partial correlations for each variable in the equation. As predicted,
Table 3

Summary of Standard Multiple Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Feeling

**Angry (Anger-W)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE B</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>sr²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive Expressiveness</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Expressiveness</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>.06 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Gender</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Age</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Gender</td>
<td>-4.5</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>-.22</td>
<td>.04 *</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* $R = .39$, $R² = .15$, Adjusted $R² = .10$, *$p < .05$. $B$ = unstandardized regression coefficient, $SE_B$ = standard error of the regression coefficient, $β$ = standardized regression coefficient, $sr²$ = squared semi-partial correlation.
negative family expressiveness was found to significantly contribute to the equation, with greater anger being associated with parents who reported higher levels of negative family expressiveness. Child gender was also found to significantly predict participants' ratings of anger, with participants with male children being associated with greater anger.

To test whether family expressiveness was associated with the intensity of participants' experience of fear a logistic multiple regression was performed predicting the weighted emotion of fear (Afraid-DW) from NEG. As shown in Table 4, a logistic regression analysis predicting the presence or absence of fear (Afraid-DW) was not significant, $\chi^2 = .42, n = 86, \text{n.s.}$.

To test whether family expressiveness was associated with the intensity of participants' experience of sadness (Sad-W) when the effects of other independent variables were removed, a multiple regression was performed using as independent variables NEG, POS, CHLDAGE, and PRNTGEN. Table 5 summarizes the results of this procedure, which was non-significant, $F (4, 81) = 1.34, \text{n.s.}$ Contrary to the hypothesis that higher negative expressiveness would predict greater Sad-W, no parent or child characteristic was associated with parents' ratings of sadness.

To test whether family expressiveness was associated with Justif-RT when the effects of other independent variables were removed, a multiple regression was performed using as independent variables NEG, POS, CHLDAGE, and CHLDGEN. In addition, the emotion of anger (Anger-W) was added as an independent variable because it was significantly correlated with Justif-RT, suggesting that parents' ratings of their anger might be related to parents feelings of justification. Standardized beta coefficients and squared semi-partial correlations for each variable in the equation appear with $R$, and
Table 4

Summary of Logistic Regression Analysis for the Prediction of the Presence or Absence of Fear (Afraid-DW)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Odds Ratio</th>
<th>W</th>
<th>β</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negative Expressiveness</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. B = unstandardized regression co-efficient, Odds Ratio = standard error of the regression co-efficient, W = Wald statistic, β = standardized regression co-efficient.
Table 5

Summary of Standard Multiple Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Feeling Sad

(Sad-W)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE B</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>sr²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive Expressiveness</td>
<td>-3.90</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Expressiveness</td>
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<td>.02</td>
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<td>Parent Gender</td>
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<td>3.03</td>
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<td>.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Child Age</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td>.018</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. R = .25, R² = .06, Adjusted R² = .02, all variables non-significant. B = unstandardized regression co-efficient, SE B = standard error of the regression co-efficient, β = standardized regression co-efficient, sr² = squared semi-partial correlation.
Multiple $R^2$ in Table 6. The multiple regression equation was significant, $F(5, 81) = 2.58, p < .05$. Contrary to the hypothesis in this study, negative family expressiveness did not significantly contribute to the equation. Only ratings of anger contributed significantly to the equation; participants who experienced greater anger were more likely to report that they felt justified for feeling as they did.

**Hypothesis 2: Regulative Rules**

Participants' ratings of their control and expression of emotion were examined independently to determine their relation to family expressiveness. As presented in Table 2 on page 39, there was a significant positive correlation between Expression-RT and Control. Because Expression-RT was reflected before transformation, this result suggests that participants who rated their emotional expressions highly tended to report lower levels of emotional control.

As noted in Table 2 on page 39, Control was not correlated with any background variable, nor was it correlated with NEG or POS. To test whether family expressiveness was associated with Control when the effects of other independent variables were removed, a multiple regression was performed using as independent variables NEG, POS, CHLDAGE, and PRNTGEN. In addition, the emotion of anger (Anger-W) was added as an independent variable because it was significantly correlated with NEG and thought to potentially influence the relation between NEG and Control. The regression equation, which is summarized in Table 7, was not significant, $F(5, 79) = .51$, n.s., suggesting that neither family expressiveness nor background variables were related to participants' ratings of emotional control.
Table 6

Summary of Standard Multiple Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Feeling

Justified for Experiencing Emotions (Justif-RT)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE B</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>sr²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive Expressiveness</td>
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<td>-.08</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Expressiveness</td>
<td>1.8</td>
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<td>.17</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Gender</td>
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<td>.07</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Age</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger-W</td>
<td>-8.8</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>-.34</td>
<td>.10 *</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. R = .37; R² = .14; Adjusted R² = .09, * p < .05. B = unstandardized regression co-efficient, SE B = standard error of the regression co-efficient, β = standardized regression co-efficient, sr² = squared semi-partial correlation.
Table 7

Summary of Standard Multiple Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Control of Emotions (Control)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
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<th>SE B</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>sr²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive Expressiveness</td>
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<td>.02</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Expressiveness</td>
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<td>.01</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Gender</td>
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<td>.53</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Age</td>
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<td>-.12</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger-W</td>
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<td>.02</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. $R = .21$; $R^2 = .04$; Adjusted $R^2 = .02$; all variables non-significant. B = unstandardized regression co-efficient, SE B = standard error of the regression co-efficient, β = standardized regression co-efficient, sr² = squared semi-partial correlation.
In addition to reporting the extent to which they controlled their emotions, participants indicated whether or not they felt they *should* have controlled their emotions. Eighty-three percent of participants reported that they felt they should have controlled their emotions at the time of the incident, while 17% reported that they should not have.

To test whether negative family expressiveness was associated with participants' belief that they should have expressed their emotion, a logistic multiple regression was performed to predict Shldcontrol from NEG. As shown in Table 8, significant results were not found, \( \chi^2 = .41, n = 86, n.s. \) Contrary to the hypothesis of the study, participants from families lower in negative expressiveness were not found to be more likely to report they should have controlled their emotions.

As noted in Table 2 on page 38, participants ratings of emotional expression (Expression-RT) was significantly negatively correlated with NEG and Anger-W. Because the variable of Expression-RT was reflected before transformation, the previous result suggests that participants who reported greater emotional expression tended to be those from families higher in negative expressiveness, and those who were more angry. In addition, the negative correlation between parent gender and Expression-RT was marginally significant, with a slight tendency for females to be associated with reports of greater emotional expression.

To test whether family expressiveness was associated with Expression-RT when the effects of other independent variables were removed, a standard multiple regression was performed using as independent variables NEG, POS, PRNTGEN, CHLDAGE and
Summary of Logistic Regression Analysis for the Prediction of Belief that Emotions Should be Controlled (Shldcontrol)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Odds Ratio</th>
<th>W</th>
<th>β</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negative Expressiveness</td>
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<td>.01</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>.99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. B = unstandardized regression co-efficient, Odds Ratio = standard error of the regression co-efficient, W = Wald statistic, β = standardized regression co-efficient.
Anger-W. The multiple regression equation for expression of emotion was found to be significant, \( F(6, 79) = 5.70, p < .001 \). The standardized beta coefficients and semi-partial correlations for each variable, \( R_x \) and Multiple \( R^2 \) are displayed in Table 9.

Contrary to the hypothesis, negative expressiveness did not significantly contribute to the prediction of the equation, despite the significant correlation between NEG and Expression-RT. Only Anger-W significantly contributed to the prediction of emotional expression, with a greater amount anger associated with greater reported expression of emotion.

Because NEG failed to significantly contribute to the prediction of emotional expression, it was theorized that shared variance with Anger-W had reduced the importance of NEG in the regression equation. This assumption was made because, as shown on Table 2 on page 39, Anger-W and NEG were significantly correlated with each other, and both were significantly correlated with Expression-RT.

Theoretically, it was postulated that participants from families higher in negative expressiveness reported greater emotional expression because they tended to feel greater feelings of anger. The correlation between expression of emotion and negative family expressiveness was reduced when Anger-W was controlled, with the partial correlation only approaching significance (\( pr = -.18, p < .10 \)). This result suggests that the correlation between parents’ negative family expressiveness and their reports of emotional expression was associated with their reported anger.

To determine whether participants from families extremely high in negative expressiveness reported significantly greater levels of emotional expression than participants from families extremely low in negative expression, NEG was divided into
Table 9

Summary of Standard Multiple Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Expression of Emotions (Expression-RT)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
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<th>sr²</th>
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<td>.02</td>
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<td>Parent Gender</td>
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<td>.01</td>
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<tr>
<td>Child Age</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger-W</td>
<td>-1.2</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>-.42</td>
<td>.16 **</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. R = .51; R² = .26; Adjusted R² = .22. ** p < .01. B = unstandardized regression coefficient, SE B = standard error of the regression coefficient, β = standardized regression coefficient, sr² = squared semi-partial correlation.
three groups of high, moderate, and low family expressiveness (NEG3). High family expressiveness consisted of people with family expressiveness scores one standard deviation higher than the mean (n = 17), low family expressiveness consisted of people one standard deviation below the mean (n = 16), and medium family expressiveness consisted of the remaining participants who reported moderate negative expressiveness (n = 52).

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted using the dependent variable of Expression-RT, and the independent variable NEG3 to check for significant differences in expression among participants grouped by negative family expressiveness. Mean ratings of expression (Expression-RT) with standard deviations in brackets for high, moderate and low groups of negative expressiveness were .34 (.30), .31 (.26) and .16 (.27) respectively. As summarized in Table 10, a significant difference was found between groups, F (2, 83) = 3.31, p < .05. To test which groups of negative expressiveness differed significantly from each other in reported expression of emotion, a post hoc Bonferroni test of significant differences was performed. Results of this analysis revealed a significant difference between the groups of high and low negative family expressiveness, suggesting that parents from families highest in negative family expressiveness rated their emotional expression significantly higher than parents lowest in negative expressiveness.

In addition to reporting the extent to which they expressed their emotions, participants indicated whether or not they felt they should have expressed their emotions. Sixty-seven percent of participants reported that they should have expressed their emotions at the time of the incident, while 31% reported that they should not have, and
### Table 10

**Analysis of Variance for Differences in Expression (Expression-RT) for Parents of Low, Medium, and High Family Expressiveness**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>3.31 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>6.59</td>
<td>7.90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>84</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**p < .01**
one participant did not answer. To test whether negative family expressiveness was
associated with participants' belief that they should have expressed their emotion, a
logistic multiple regression was performed predicting Shldexpress from NEG. As shown
in Table 11, significant results were not found, $\chi^2 = .01$, $n = 86$, n.s.. Contrary to the
hypothesis of the study, participants from families higher in negative expressiveness were
not found to be more likely to report they should have expressed their emotions.

**Hypothesis 3: Heuristic Rules**

As noted in Table 2 on page 39, the extent to which participants reported using their emotions as a strategy was not significantly correlated with any background variable, and was only marginally correlated with negative expressiveness. To test whether family expressiveness was associated with strategic use of emotion (Strategy) when the effects of other independent variables were removed, a multiple regression was performed using as independent variables NEG, POS, CHLDAGE, PRNTGEN, and Anger-W. As summarized in Table 12, no significant result was obtained for the regression equation, $F(5, 81) = .97$, n.s.

To determine whether strategic use of emotion differed among participants in low, medium and high groups of negative expressiveness, a one-way ANOVA was performed using NEG3 as the independent variable and Strategy as the dependent variable. Mean ratings of purposeful emotion use, with their standard deviations in brackets were 2.18 (.32 ), 4.61 (1.10 ) and 3.81 (.73) for the low, medium, and high groups of NEG respectively. As summarized on Table 13, a significant difference was found among groups. To determine which differences among groups were significant a post hoc test was performed using a modified Bonferroni test of significant differences. A
Table 11

Summary of Logistic Regression Analysis Predicting Belief that Emotions Should be Expressed

(Shldexpress)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Odds Ratio</th>
<th>W</th>
<th>β</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negative Expressiveness</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. B = unstandardized regression co-efficient, Odds Ratio = standard error of the regression co-efficient, W = Wald statistic, β = standardized regression co-efficient.
Table 12

Summary of Standard Multiple Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Use of Emotion as a Strategy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE B</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>sr²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive Expressiveness</td>
<td>-4.6</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Expressiveness</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Gender</td>
<td>-.53</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Age</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger-W</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. $R = .24; R^2 = .06; \text{Adjusted } R^2 = 0.00$, all variables non-significant; $B =$ unstandardized regression co-efficient, $SE_B =$ standard error of the regression co-efficient, $\beta =$ standardized regression co-efficient, $sr^2 =$ squared semi-partial correlation.
Table 13

Analysis of Variance for Differences in strategic emotion use (Strategy) for Parents of Low, Medium, and High Family Expressiveness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>76.74</td>
<td>38.37</td>
<td>6.76 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>465.22</td>
<td>5.67</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>84</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** p < .01
significant difference was found between the low and medium groups of negative family expressiveness. Contrary to the hypothesis that strategic emotion use would decrease with higher levels of negative family expressiveness, extremely low negative family expressiveness was associated with significantly less use of emotion as a strategy compared to medium levels, while extremely high negative expressiveness was not significantly different from either the high or low groups.

The relation between family expressiveness and coping strategies was examined using relative measures of coping strategies. Relative measures involve the proportion that each coping strategy was used by an individual, relative to all other strategies used, and gives an indication of the importance of that strategy in the individual’s total coping response. Mean percentages for relative use of coping strategies in order of magnitude were: 22% for planful problem solving, 16% for self-control, 15% for confrontive coping, 13% for seeking social support, 10% for accepting responsibility, 10% for positive reappraisal, 9% for distancing and 5% for escape avoidance. Table 14 displays the correlations between relative coping strategies and both positive and negative family expressiveness. As expected, greater negative family expressiveness was significantly correlated negatively with use of distancing and positively with use of confrontive coping. Although it was expected that greater negative family expressiveness would be associated with less acceptance of responsibility for the situation, NEG was significantly positively correlated with relative measures of accepting responsibility. Although it was hypothesized that lower negative family expressiveness would be associated with greater use of self control and positive reappraisal, and with lower use of seeking social support,
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coping Strategy</th>
<th>Negative Expressiveness</th>
<th>Positive Expressiveness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accepting Responsibility</td>
<td>.22 *</td>
<td>-.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confrontive</td>
<td>.26 **</td>
<td>-.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distancing</td>
<td>-.26 **</td>
<td>.20 †</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escape-Avoidance</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>-.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planful Problem-Solving</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Re-appraisal</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Control</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking Social Support</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>.21 *</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05, ** p < .01, † p < .10
these coping strategies were not significantly correlated with NEG. Unexpectedly, POS was significantly correlated with use of seeking social support, and marginally correlated with use of distancing.

**Unexpected Results not Considered in Hypotheses**

Although not associated with any independent variables in the hypotheses, parents' belief that they should have expressed their emotions was found to be related to other dependent variables in the study. Specifically, parents' belief that they should have expressed their emotions was positively correlated with the transformed variable of expression (Expression-RT; \( r = .29, p < .01 \)) and negatively correlated with the transformed variable justification for feeling their emotions (Justif-RT; \( r = -.23, p < .05 \)). These results suggest that, rather than relating to parent or child characteristics, parents belief that their expression of emotion was appropriate was associated with ratings of their actual expression and with their justification for feeling their emotions. Parents with greater sense of justification for feeling their emotions and with lower reports of emotional expression tended to report that they should have expressed their emotions. Interestingly, parents' belief that they should have controlled their emotions was not related to their ratings of control, nor was it associated with their sense of justification in feeling their emotions.

As shown in Table 2 on page 39, parents' ratings of emotional control and their use of emotion as a strategy were significantly correlated at a probability level of \( p < .001 \), although neither of these variables showed strong relations with other variables in the study. By contrast, emotional expression was significantly correlated with parents' ratings of negative expressiveness, anger, and sense of justification. The comparatively
close relation between control and strategic emotion use in the absence of significant
correlations with other variables in the study suggests that emotional control and
purposeful use of emotion share similar influences, and that each is influenced by
different conditions than is emotional expression.

Because of the unexpected finding that NEG was correlated with parent gender,
correlations among the subgroups of negative family expressiveness and gender were
examined. A significant correlation was found between parent gender and negative
submissive family expressiveness ($r = .29$, $p < .01$), suggesting that women tended to rate
their families as higher in submissive negative expressions. However, the correlation
between parent gender and dominant negative family expressiveness was not significant
($r = .09$, n.s.).

**Summary of Results**

To test the hypothesis that negative family expressiveness was related to parents’
ratings of their own negative emotions during a stressful incident, three separate multiple
regressions were performed. Anger, fear, and sadness were each predicted by negative
and positive family expressiveness, as well as by parent and child characteristics thought
to potentially influence parents’ ratings of these emotions. As expected, negative family
expressiveness predicted parents’ ratings of anger, with parents from families highly
negatively expressive reporting greater experiences of anger. Unexpectedly, negative
expressiveness did not significantly contribute to the prediction of parents’ presence or
absence of fear, nor to parents’ ratings of sadness. Positive family expressiveness was
not related to parents’ ratings of negative emotion, as hypothesized.
Results did not support the hypothesis that parents higher in negative expressiveness would feel more justified in experiencing their emotions. The multiple regression equation predicting parents’ sense of justification for their emotions was not significant, suggesting that none of the parent or child variables considered, including those of family expressiveness, were related to parents’ belief that they had a right to feel their emotions.

An ANOVA revealed that, as predicted, parents from families high in negative expressiveness reported significantly more expression than parents lower in negative expressiveness. However, negative expressiveness did not significantly contribute to the prediction of emotional expression in a standard multiple regression. Instead, only participants’ ratings of their anger significantly contributed to the prediction of expression. Unexpectedly, parents lower in negative expressiveness were not found to report greater control of emotions; negative expressiveness was not correlated with ratings of control, nor was the multiple regression significant that predicted control from family expressiveness and other independent variables.

The hypothesis that lower family expressiveness would be associated with higher ratings of strategic emotion use was not supported. Instead, it was found that parents from families that were extremely low in negative expressiveness were significantly less likely to report the use of emotion as a strategy than parents from moderately negatively expressive families, with parents from families extremely high in negative expressiveness falling somewhere in between. As predicted negative expressiveness was correlated positively with use of confrontive coping strategies and negatively with distancing strategies. However, contrary to the hypothesis, negative expressiveness was not
correlated with seeking social support. Although it was hypothesized that positive family expressiveness would not be associated with coping strategies, it was found to be positively correlated with seeking social support.
CHAPTER IV
DISCUSSION

In general, the results of the study supported the hypothesis that the frequency of negative emotions expressed in parents’ families of origin would be related to their perceptions about the experience, expression and use of negative emotions during a stressful situation with one of their children, although the relationships were not always as expected. Results also supported the hypothesis that positive emotional expressiveness in parents’ family background does not significantly contribute to these emotion rules. A discussion of the specific hypotheses and of general findings of the study will follow.

Hypothesis 1: Constitutive Rules

As predicted, parents who reported more frequent negative emotional expressions in their family of origin rated their experiences of anger higher than those from families less expressive of negative affect. The association between negative family expressiveness and the experience of anger remained even when parent and child characteristics were considered. The hypothesis that positive family expressiveness would not be related to parents’ ratings of their negative emotions was also supported. These findings are consistent with those of Burrowes and Halberstadt (1987), who similarly found that negative family expressiveness was associated with more intense and longer-lasting feelings of anger, but that positive family expressiveness was unrelated to anger experience.

The predicted relation with negative family expressiveness was not supported for sadness and fear, however. Negative expressiveness did not predict whether or not
parents reported feelings of fear, nor was it related to parents' ratings of sadness. One explanation for the association of negative family expressiveness with anger exclusively is that anger may be the negative emotion most frequently and intensely experienced by parents in stressful situations. If sad or fearful expressions are less frequently observed within the family, people may not internalize their families' expressions of fear to the same extent as they do their expressions of anger. The present study provides support for the assumption about the relative prominence of parental anger, although it was not examined directly. Some anger was reported by nearly all of the parents in the study, with over three-quarters of the parents rating their anger at the time of the incident as extreme, likely because all participants had written about a stressful incident occurring with their child. In contrast, fewer parents reported feeling sad, and almost half of the parents reported experiencing no fear at all.

Two further possibilities involve difficulties in measures used in this study. First, the measurement of fear in terms of its presence or absence may not have been precise enough to demonstrate a relation with negative expressiveness. Second, Halberstadt's (1986) Family Expressiveness Questionnaire may contain a disproportionate number of anger-related items, making sadness and fear less relevant. Further research is needed to examine these possibilities in greater detail. The fact that anger, sadness, and fear were differentially associated with family expressiveness suggests that these emotions need to be analyzed separately in future studies.

The hypothesis that parents from families high in negative expressiveness would feel more justified in their emotional experiences was not supported by this study. Instead, parents' anger ratings were better predictors of their reported justification than
were characteristics of the parent or child, with parents who reported feeling more justified in their emotions also reporting more anger. The results therefore suggest that individuals from families highly expressive of negative affect may experience anger to a greater extent, but they do not necessarily feel more entitled to experience emotions that way. This finding does not support the assumption that higher levels of family expressiveness make one more accepting of emotionality, as suggested by Burrowes and Halberstadt (1987). The authors argued that the more intense anger experiences associated with people from families higher in negative expressiveness were a result of internalized norms and values about the appropriateness of negative emotions. The present study, however, suggests that individuals from families higher in negative expressiveness do not necessarily rate more highly their rights as parents to feel their emotions.

Evidence that emotion can have a contagious effect provides a possible explanation for the relation between negative family expression and anger. Studies in social psychology have indicated that people tend to “catch” the emotions they see others displaying (Buck, 1988). Among the many explanations for this phenomenon is the suggestion that people mimic and synchronize with the emotional expressions they observe in others, and that the feedback from one’s own emotional expressions provide the experience of that emotion (Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1992). Jakobs, Fischer, and Manstead (1997) further note that the experience of emotions can be modified if they are “co-experienced”; that is, the knowledge that other people feel in a similar way can enhance (or decrease) that individual’s emotional experience. Therefore, witnessing displays of negative emotion in the home may make children feel negative emotions
more frequently, while the knowledge that other family members also feel negatively may intensify their emotional experience.

Several studies have demonstrated that people from highly expressive homes tend to be more self-expressive (Halberstadt, 1991), providing a second explanation for the influence of family expressiveness on one’s emotional experiences. It is therefore possible that people’s own emotional expressions may augment or diffuse their initial emotional experiences, making those who are more expressive experience their emotion more intensely. There is evidence to suggest that people’s spontaneous emotional expressions present them with clues as to the nature and intensity of the emotions they are experiencing, so that smiling, for example, can increase an individual’s feelings of happiness (McIntosh, 1996; Tomkins, 1981). However, the role of self-expressiveness in moderating one’s emotional experiences is not supported by the finding that people’s self-expressiveness of emotion is unrelated to their ratings of anger intensity (Burrowes & Halberstadt, 1987).

Finally, the effect of negative family expressiveness and parents’ experiences of anger may have been influenced by their role as parents. Parkinson (1997) suggests that an individual’s emotions can be manufactured by the demands of their role. He argues that certain roles require the person to display a certain emotional state, such as happiness in stewardesses. Over time, the emotional experience demanded by the role begins to be subjectively experienced when the person is in the proper situation. In this study, negative family expressiveness may have influenced parents’ constitutive rules of anger, through modeling of affect by their own parents. Parents who see strong
emotional expression as a part of a parent's role, because their own parents were highly expressive, may be more likely to report their emotions to a greater degree.

**Hypothesis 2: Regulative Rules**

As hypothesized, negative family expressiveness was strongly related to parents' ratings of their emotional expression at the time of the incident. Parents from families higher in negative expressiveness reported that they expressed their emotion to a greater extent than those from less negatively expressive families. Also consistent with the hypotheses of the study, positive family expressiveness did not affect parents' reported emotional expression. These findings are concordant with previous studies, which link individuals' total family expressiveness to their self-expressiveness of emotions in general (Halberstadt et al., 1995; Halberstadt et al., 1993). The present study also supports Burrowes' and Halberstadt's (1988) study on anger which reported that participants' anger expressions were related to their negative, but not positive, family expressiveness.

However, the study suggested that the increased emotional expression in parents from highly negatively expressive families may be related to those parents' greater reports of anger, rather than being directly associated with family expressiveness. When anger, child characteristics, and other parent characteristics were examined in conjunction with family expressiveness, only anger predicted the extent to which parents reported expressing their emotions. The dominance of anger intensity in the prediction of emotional expression suggests that family expressiveness may not itself determine emotional expressiveness during stressful incidents. It may be that parents from families
highly expressive of negative affect tend to be angry, and therefore tend to be more emotionally expressive during stressful incidents.

The present study suggests that parents’ emotional experience, but not necessarily their emotional expression, is influenced by a background high in negative family expressiveness. This finding is incongruent to that of Burrowes and Halberstadt (1987), who found that people from families higher in negative family expressiveness reported more frequent expressions of anger, even when the intensity of their anger experiences were controlled. Burrowes’ and Halberstadt’s (1987) study therefore suggests that the greater expressions of anger are associated with people from families highly expressive of negative affect, regardless of the intensity of their anger. One possible explanation for this discrepancy is the number of circumstances upon which participants based their reports of anger in the two studies. While participants in the Burrowes and Halberstadt study (1987) reported the intensity of their anger experiences across a broad range of situations, participants in the present study rated their anger during a single stressful incident that occurred with their one of their children. The more comprehensive measure of anger in Burrowes’ and Halberstadt’s (1987) study may have produced a more accurate depiction of participants’ anger experiences. Another possibility is that there may be something specific to parenting situations that limits the relation between one’s anger expression and emotional family background. Further research is needed to examine these possibilities in more detail.

It was hypothesized that parents from highly negatively expressive families would feel more comfortable expressing their emotions, and would therefore be more likely to report that they should have expressed their emotions at the time of the incident.
However, negative family expressiveness did not predict parents' belief as to whether they should have expressed their emotions. Results of the present study are inconsistent with those of King and Emmons (1990), who found that people from families low in expressiveness reported more ambivalence towards expressing their emotions than did people from highly expressive families. Also somewhat inconsistent with the present study are the results of Burrowes and Halberstadt (1987), who reported that negative family expressiveness was associated with an increased desire to express anger, and a decreased desire to control anger.

Contrary to the hypothesis that parents from families more expressive of negative affect would report less control of their emotions and be less likely to feel that their emotions should have been controlled, negative family expressiveness was not related to parents' perceptions of their emotional control, nor was it associated with their belief that they should have controlled their emotion. Again, the first finding is contrary to that of Burrowes and Halberstadt (1987), who found that participants from families lower in negative expressiveness reported greater control over their anger. However, Burrowes and Halberstadt (1987) found no relation between negative family expressiveness and the desire to control anger, a result supported by the present study.

The results of the present study suggest that parents from families low in negative expressiveness do not necessarily see themselves as controlling their emotions more, even though they rate the expression of their emotions as lower than those from more highly negatively expressive families. There are at least three interpretations for this finding, both of which require further research to examine their validity. First, it is possible that parents who were comfortable rating the emotional expressions of their
families as high were also more likely to rate their own expression as high, but this bias did not extend to emotional control. A second possibility is that parents’ reports were influenced by the social acceptability of the concepts being examined. The social acceptability of emotional expression is ambiguous because an appropriate amount of parental emotional expression is considered healthy. Each individual can determine what is “appropriate”. However, emotional control might be a concept more universally accepted as desirable, especially for negative emotions. An indication that social acceptability differs between the control and expression of emotions is that a large majority of parents in this study reported that they should have controlled their emotions, whereas the number reporting that they should have expressed their emotions was less than half. Subsequent studies need to examine people’s interpretations of emotional expression and control, as well as the social acceptability of each concept.

A third interpretation is that parents from families lower in negative expressiveness actually do express their emotions to a lesser extent, and parents from highly negatively expressive families actually do tend to express their emotions more, but that everyone varies in the degree to which they need to control their emotional displays. As Underwood (1997) notes, there is a distinction between the “effortful regulation” of emotion and low arousability. Some people may display a relatively low amount of emotion through deliberate effort (e.g., by biting their lips or by re-assessing the situation in a positive light) while others may simply feel no desire to express their emotions to the same extent. Negative family expressiveness may be associated with an individual’s expression of negative emotions but be unrelated to their perception that these emotions need to be controlled.
Hypothesis 3: Heuristic Rules

Although negative family expressiveness was found to be associated with parents’ purposeful use of emotions, the nature of the relationship was not as expected. Rather than lower negative family expressiveness predicting greater strategic emotion use, as was hypothesized, a curvilinear relationship was found. Parents from families extremely low in negative expressiveness reported the least deliberate use of emotion when compared to parents with backgrounds of moderate negative expressiveness. Those from families extremely high in family expressiveness reported less purposeful use of emotion, although the difference was not significant. These results suggest that low negative family expressiveness does not increase one’s sense that emotions can be purposefully used, even though, as Halberstadt (1991) suggests, it may increase one’s ability to deliberately express emotions. Instead, the present results suggest that extremes of negative emotional expression in parents’ family background makes them less likely to see emotion as a tool to change aspects of a stressful situation.

Heuristic emotion rules extend to an individual’s choice of coping strategies when emotions become devices to deal with troubling situations. Based on the expectation that emotions would be more skillfully manipulated by individuals from less negatively expressive homes, it was hypothesized that parents from families where negative emotion was expressed infrequently would use coping strategies to a relatively greater extent that involved deliberately focusing on one’s emotions in an attempt to deal with emotion-provoking situations—for example, re-appraising the stressful situation in a positive light in order to feel happy or avoiding thoughts about the stressful situation in order to relieve
anxiety. The emotion-focused coping strategies that parents adopted were assumed to reflect their implicit assumptions about the purpose of emotions.

As expected, no relation was found between family expressiveness and the problem-focused coping strategy of planful problem-solving. The hypothesis that various emotion-focused coping strategies would be used more extensively by parents from less negatively expressive families was not supported. Some emotion-focused coping strategies were associated with family expressiveness, although not always in the expected direction. As expected, relative reliance on distancing one's self from the problem was associated with negative family expressiveness, with people from families lower in negative expressiveness using relatively more distancing. The use of distancing can be either beneficial or detrimental to parenting situations, depending on the frequency of its use and its combination with other coping strategies. If used to advantage, distancing can be used to reduce parents' negative affect to a level that allows them to respond appropriately. However, it can also be used to avoid dealing with situations that require parents' intervention, if it is used in relative exclusion of other coping strategies. A relatively strong reliance on distancing techniques has been linked to worsening of one's emotional state (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988), and may tend to be adopted by people who are less emotionally mature (Labouvie-Vief, Hakim-Larson, & Hobart, 1987). What a strong reliance on distancing techniques may imply is that the person does not see high levels of negative affect as desirable or appropriate in the situation to which it is applied. The greater use of distancing strategies used by parents from families lower in negative expressiveness may reflect their deliberate attempts to maintain lower levels of negative affect during stressful situations with their children.
Although it was hypothesized that parents from less negatively expressive families would report a greater relative use of accepting responsibility than those from more highly negatively expressive families, the opposite result was found. Parents who were raised in homes with a great deal of negative affect were more likely to accept responsibility for the stressful situation. The self-critical nature of some of the items may have contributed to their increased endorsement by parents from families higher in negative expressiveness. For example, two examples of accepting responsibility are: “criticized or lectured myself” and “realized that I brought the problem on myself”.

Perhaps parents who were raised in homes with frequent negative expression are more likely to chastise themselves than parents raised in homes with less negative affect. Two more emotion-focused coping strategies that were expected to be used more extensively by parents from less negatively expressive families, self-control and positive re-appraisal, were unrelated to negative family expressiveness.

It was hypothesized that coping strategies that attempt to directly modify the stressful situation, planful problem solving and confrontive coping, would be unrelated to family expressiveness. As expected, no relation was found between family expressiveness and the problem-focused coping strategy of planful problem-solving. However, a relatively stronger reliance on confrontive coping strategies was found in parents from families highly expressive of negative affect. Although confrontive coping was associated with parents’ reports of anger, the relation between confrontive coping and negative family expressiveness remained significant when anger was statistically controlled. This suggests that at equal levels of anger, parents from families who were
more expressive of negative affect tend to use relatively more confrontive coping strategies with their children.

Some reliance on confrontive coping strategies is adaptive in parenting situations, as parents need to set consistent limits to their children’s actions and firmly counter problem behaviour. However, confrontive coping strategies tend to involve setting one’s self against another person or the environment, as in two examples: “stood my ground and fought for what I wanted”, and “tried to get the person responsible to change his or her mind”. Dix (1991) suggests that cooperative strategies like negotiating, compromising, and convincing, are the most effective methods of resolving conflicts with children in the long-term, while forceful strategies can increase negative behaviour in children, and undermine the warmth and trust in the parent-child relationship. Folkman and Lazarus (1988) argue that confrontive coping as measured by the Ways of Coping Questionnaire may represent a maladaptive form of problem-focused coping because it “fails not only to improve person-environment relationships but even to provide relief from distress emotions” (p. 473).

Finally, although it was expected that parents from families higher in negative expression would feel more comfortable expressing their emotions to others in times of stress, positive but not negative family expressiveness was associated with greater use of social support. In retrospect, the relation between seeking social support and positive family expressiveness is not surprising, given the greater social competence attributed to people from families high in positive family expressiveness (Boyum & Parke, 1995; MacDonald & Parke, 1984). Being raised in a home with frequent positive displays of emotion has also been linked to more frequent self-expression of positive emotion and
with greater popularity (Halberstadt, 1991; Halberstadt et al., 1990). Because they may feel more comfortable in the presence of others, parents raised in families with frequent emotional expression may tend to rely on other people during stressful situations.

The Influence of Parent and Child Characteristics

When considered in isolation from other influences, only one characteristic of the parent was significantly related to parents’ ratings of their negative emotions, specifically fear. Unexpectedly, more fathers than mothers reported feeling fear, contrary to studies cited by Brody and Hall (1993) that suggest fear is more common in women. Again, it might be that individuals’ ratings of emotion may be different in parenting situations than in other situations. Although not statistically significant, the present study also suggested that greater experiences of anger may be associated with mothers, a finding consistent with many studies reporting that women experience both positive and negative emotions more intensely than men (Brody & Hall, 1993; Deiner, Sandvik & Larsen, 1985, King & Emmons, 1990). In terms of emotional expression, mothers in this study reported expressing their emotions to a greater extent than did fathers. This result is consistent with reports that women are generally more expressive of emotions, but it is contrary to the limited number of studies that suggest men are more expressive of anger and other outward-directed emotions (Brody & Hall, 1993). Child characteristics were related to differences in intensity of fear and anger, with more fear being reported by parents of first-born than later-born children, and greater anger with sons than with daughters. With the exception of the association between male children and anger, however, parent and child characteristics when considered with negative family expressiveness were not significant predictors of parents’ ratings of emotional experience and expression.
Results of the Study not Addressed in the Hypotheses

Two unexpected results make interpretation of the results more difficult. First, unlike previous studies on family expressiveness (e.g. Cooley, 1992, Burrowes & Halberstadt, 1987, Halberstadt et al., 1993; Halberstadt, 1986), participants' negative and positive expressiveness were found to be significantly negatively correlated in this sample, so that participants’ with families that expressed a great deal of negative emotion were less likely to have families that expressed positive emotions frequently. Therefore, one limitation of the study is the close (negative) relationship between positive and negative expressiveness in this sample which makes it difficult to interpret the influences of positive and negative family expressiveness individually. Participants’ reports of greater anger, confrontive coping strategies, and emotional expression that are associated with highly negatively expressive families may also be associated with corresponding low frequency of positive expressions.

A second unexpected result that makes interpretation of the study more difficult was that females reported a background higher in negative expressiveness than did males. Burrowes and Halberstadt (1987) similarly found that females reported higher levels of negative family expressiveness, and additionally noted that females reported slightly lower positive expressiveness. While the present study controlled for the effects of parent gender when examining the influence of negative family expressiveness, the fact that females may respond differently than do males to the Family Expressiveness Questionnaire needs to be examined. One possible explanation for this gender difference might simply be reporting bias, with females being more willing to report negative family
expressions. Alternatively, although the construct of family expressiveness is ostensibly a measure of emotional expression in the entire family, there may be differences in the actual or perceived emotional environment of males and females, thereby leading to different ratings of family expressiveness. Brody and Hall (1993) cite studies suggesting that daughters are exposed to a wider range of emotions by their parents, lending support to the possibility that the same family may socialize emotions differently in boys and girls. Further research is needed to further examine how parents’ emotions differ with the gender of their children, and to determine whether sons and daughters might have slightly different interpretations of their families’ emotional environment.

When the relation between gender and negative family expressiveness was examined in terms of the dominance of emotional expressions, only submissive negative family expressiveness was associated with gender. Submissive negative expressions include, for example, crying for being punished, and expressing embarrassment over a stupid mistake, while dominant ones include criticism and contempt. Perhaps it is the submissive nature of the negative emotions that is more obvious to females, either because they are more often the recipient of these expressions, or because submissive expressions are more noticeable to them. To further understand the gender difference in measures of negative expressiveness, future research could incorporate differences in the dominance and submissiveness of emotional expressions into the study of parents’ socialization of emotion in their sons and daughters.

Limitations of the Study

One shortcoming of the present study is that it is based on reports of a single incident. Since each incident in which parents find themselves will elicit different
emotion rules, one difficulty in relating participants' emotional reactions to differences in parental characteristics is the lack of consistency in incidents among participants. What parents selected to describe was considered here to be a representative sample of their emotional responding because they were given no guidance as to the type of situation to depict. Parents' emotion rules were therefore inferred by the experience, expression and use of emotions associated with that particular incident. However, there is likely to be a great variability in parents' emotional reactions so that reliance on a single incident not only fails to provide a full picture but is also too sensitive to atypical responses. Increasing the number of incidents for parents to describe would eliminate some of the variability, as would increasing the sample size.

Interpretation of the present study is further constrained because of its exclusive reliance on self-report and retrospection. While this study describes parents' perceptions of their emotion rules, it does not provide information about their actual behaviour during stressful parenting situations. Some evidence exists for a moderate agreement between self-report and observed affect (Boyum & Parke, 1995; Cassidy et al., 1992), but agreement is not perfect. It is quite possible that parents in this study differed in their awareness of their emotional reactions, with some parents being more accurate than others about their actual behaviour or of the emotional environment of their childhood home. In addition, self-reports are limited by influences like the participants' expectations or attitudes towards the study, their desire for social acceptance, and faulty recollection of actual events.

Characteristics of the sample were other sources of limitation in the present study. First, as implied earlier, the sample may have been too small to get significant results for
relations that might actually exist, particularly for those findings that approached significance. Second, the age range from infancy to early adulthood may have obscured information about parent’s emotions that were specific to a particular developmental stage of the child. Controlling for age partially addressed this problem, but a clearer picture of parents’ emotions may have been derived if larger groups of children were examined separately in each age group. Third, the generalizability of the study was limited by the source of recruitment, with all participants being enrolled in university psychology classes. Education in general, particularly in psychology, may have reduced the extent to which parents’ emotional backgrounds were linked to their present emotional reactions. University education, particularly in psychology, introduces people to new ideas about emotions and may therefore have influenced participants’ reports of the incident as well as their actual emotional reactions. Fourth, the study did not consider potential differences in emotional expressiveness among various family structures such as those headed by single parents or those that include multiple generations living in one household.

Further limitations to the study involve the reliance on a measure based on single responses, chosen in the absence of a validated measure of the issues in question. Such a measure can only provide information about how the participant would answer that particular question rather than illuminate a broader attitude or style of behaviour. Thus, the present study is able only to determine, for example, that parents from families higher in negative expressiveness say that they expressed their behaviour extremely highly; it cannot ascertain whether parents consistently rated their emotional expression higher in various modalities such as voice, body posture, etc. A second difficulty with the reliance
on a single response is that differences in the interpretation of the question strongly
influence results, a problem that may have been encountered in the present study. An
overview of participants’ written responses revealed that parents may have had different
interpretations to the questions about whether or not they should have expressed or
controlled their emotions. In addition, there may have been at least two interpretations of
the question regarding use of emotion as a strategy (i.e., the extent to which emotions
were deliberately used to achieve a goal or the extent to which parents retrospectively
considered that their emotions had served a purpose to them). Finally, ceiling effects
exacerbated by use of a single-response measure may have concealed significant
relations among variables. For example, half of the participants gave the highest rating to
their sense of justification for experiencing their emotions, leaving it little opportunity to
vary with negative expressiveness.

Suggestions for Future Research

Further research is necessary to examine parents’ emotions in relation to their
family expressiveness while addressing the limitations discussed above. First, the sample
chosen should be larger, involve people from a variety of backgrounds, and consist of one
age group at a time. Second, observation of parents and target children, as well as
obtaining information from a family member or friend, can be used to corroborate
parents’ responses on self-report measures. Third, the same measures could be repeated
for different incidents to provide a more representative sample of parents’ emotional
responses, or the parent could provide information for incidents with different children to
provide insight into the influence of child characteristics. Finally, a measure should be
developed to measure parents’ experience, expression and use of emotion during a single
incident with their children. This measure needs to be based on responses to a variety of
items, and can be checked for reliability and validity.

An issue for future research raised by this study is the relation between family
expressiveness and emotional intensity. Halberstadt (1991) has suggested that children
learn to experience emotions in the same contexts in which they observe those emotions
expressed by others. It is not clear from this explanation why individuals would develop
more intense experiences of negative emotion as a result of observing these emotions
more frequently. Subsequent studies could examine the following possibilities. Perhaps
the greater number of situations in which anger is considered appropriate to people from
families high in negative expressiveness increases the intensity of their anger to less
important incidents, relative to people less inclined to get angry. Or perhaps the
frequency of negative expressions within a family is associated with the intensity that
those emotions are expressed.

The issue of temperament also needs to be addressed in future research on family
expressiveness. Goldsmith (1993) notes that inherited biological dispositions towards
certain types of emotional behaviour may interact with environmental variables as early
as infancy. Some consistency in emotions between individuals and their families may be
due to inherited tendencies. Studies of children who have been adopted by non-relatives
may distinguish individuals’ biological inheritance from effects of their families’
socialization of emotion. In addition, studies examining the similarities and differences
in temperament among children in families similar in emotional expressiveness may
provide some insight into the interaction between temperament and the socialization of
emotion.
The effects of characteristics such as consistency, clarity, and controlled expression of parental negative affect also needs to be approached. Highly intense and frequent displays of negative emotion are harmful to children (Dix, 1991), but it is unclear whether it is the negative affect itself which is damaging or whether high negative affect is merely more common in dysfunctional parenting. As Dix (1991) notes, it is difficult to separate frequency of negative expressions from poor parenting practices, because poor parenting tends to co-occur with excesses or deficits in parents’ emotions. For example, depressed parents are not just low in emotional expressiveness, but also tend to be more rejecting and critical of their children (Kaslow et al., 1994). Abusive parents tend to be high in negative expressiveness, but such parenting is also associated with characteristics such as low levels of maturity, single parenthood, and poverty (Steinberg, Catalano, & Dooley, 1981; Lempers, Clark-Lempers, & Simons, 1989). The specific mechanisms by which negative emotional expression influences children needs to be determined.

Concluding Remarks

Negative family expressiveness was found to be more important than positive family expressiveness in influencing parents’ emotion rules about a stressful situation. While there is no evidence that the parenting of any of the participants was maladaptive, results suggest that a moderate level of negative affect within the family provides the optimal environment for the development of emotional regulation, as is proposed by Boyum and Parke (1995). On the one hand, high levels of negative expression in parents’ families of origin were related to their higher ratings of anger, emotional expression, and use of confrontive coping strategies — tendencies that could be
detrimental to their children's emotional development if too extreme. In his review of the parenting literature, Dix (1991) suggests that extreme displays of negative emotion are both a sign of family dysfunction and a contributing factor to the parenting deficits associated with these families. He further argues that extreme negative affect can make parents focus on short-term, self-focused goals rather than long-term, child-focused motives – specifically by encouraging them to use more controlling methods of discipline and to demand immediate compliance.

On the other hand, parents who were from families where negative affect was expressed less frequently were more likely to distance themselves from the situation and to avoid using their emotions to resolve the stressful situation. Perhaps an environment too low in negative expression prevents one from feeling comfortable with negative emotional expressions, and therefore inhibits parents from coping directly with stressful incidents and from using their emotions purposefully to meet their goals. Evidence that family expression of negative emotions is best at a moderate level comes from Denham et al. (1997) who found that parents' negative emotional expressions which are displayed at a medium level teach children to accept their own negative expressions and maintain their emotional displays at a socially acceptable level.
References


APPENDIX A

Modified Parental Emotions Questionnaire

Constitutive Rules:

(1) For the incident you described, please rate the degree to which you felt each of the following emotions for three periods of time: (a) at the time of the incident, (b) shortly after the incident, (c) now. Use the following rating scale to assign a number for the degree of each feeling at each point of time.

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
not at all moderate extreme

at the time afterwards now

a) angry

________   ________   ______

b) afraid

________   ________   ______

c) sad

________   ________   ______

Please explain your original feelings (as rated above) and how they changed over time.

Whenever possible, please give details about when, where, how, and why your feelings changed.

(Note: In the original questionnaire, twelve specific emotions were considered; however, only angry, afraid, and sad will be considered in the present study.)

(2) To what extent do you think you had a right as a parent to feel the way you did? Rate your responses for three periods of time: (a) at the time of the incident, (b) shortly after the incident, and (c) now.
no right at all  somewhat of a right  a great right
0  1  2  3  4  5  6   7

a) at the time ________  b) afterwards ____________  c) now _______

Please explain. ________________________________

Regulative Rules:

(3) To what extent do you think you **expressed** your feelings in your facial expressions, your body, your tone of voice, or words spoken? Rate your responses for three periods of time: (a) at the time of the incident, (b) shortly after the incident, and (c) now.

did not express at all  expressed somewhat  expressed greatly
0  1  2  3  4  5  6  7

a) at the time __________  b) afterwards ____________  c) now _______

3a) Should you have expressed these feelings? Please check yes or no for each period of time.

at the time: yes ___ no _____.

afterwards: yes ___ no _____.

now: yes ___ no ______

Please state your reasons why or why not.

(4) To what extent do you think you **controlled** your feelings in your facial expressions, your body, your tone of voice, or words spoken? Rate your responses for three periods of time: (a) at the time of the incident, (b) shortly after the incident, and (c) now.

did not control at all  controlled somewhat  controlled greatly
0  1  2  3  4  5  6  7

a) at the time __________  b) afterwards ____________  c) now _______
4a) Should you have controlled these feelings? Please check yes or no for each period of time.

at the time: yes ___  no ___

afterwards: yes ___  no ___

now: yes ___  no ___

Please state your reasons why or why not.

Heuristic Rules:

(5) To what extent do you think your feelings and reactions were part of a plan or strategy you used to change your child, yourself, someone else, or the situation? In other words, to what extent do you feel your emotions and reactions served a purpose for you? Rate your responses for three periods of time: (a) at the time of the incident, (b) shortly after the incident, (c) now.

not at all  somewhat to a great extent

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

a) at the time  b) afterwards  c) now

Please explain your responses as completely as possible.
**APPENDIX B**

**Definition of Variables used in the Study**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NEG</td>
<td>Negative Expressiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POS</td>
<td>Positive Expressiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHLDAGE</td>
<td>Age of target child (in years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHLDGEN</td>
<td>Gender of target child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRTHORD</td>
<td>Birth order of target child (first-born or later-born)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRNTGEN</td>
<td>Gender of parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger-W</td>
<td>Weighted rating of anger over the three time periods (at the time, later, now)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sad-W</td>
<td>Weighted rating of sadness over the three time periods (at the time, later, now)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afraid-DW</td>
<td>Weighted reports of the presence or absence of fear over the three time periods (at the time, later, now)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justif-RT</td>
<td>Transformed and reflected ratings of parents feelings of justification for feeling their emotions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expression-RT</td>
<td>Transformed and reflected ratings of participants’ ratings of their emotional expression at the time of the incident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shldexpress</td>
<td>Whether or not participants believed they should have expressed their emotions (yes/no)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>Participants’ ratings of their emotional control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shldcontrol</td>
<td>Whether or not participants believed they should have controlled their emotions (yes/no)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy</td>
<td>Ratings of use of emotion of a strategy at the time of the incident</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
VITA AUCTORIS

Jody Levenbach graduated with a B.A. in psychology from Queen's University in 1989 and a B.A. (Hons.) from the University of Windsor in 1990. After teaching English as a second language in Osaka, Japan for a year, Jody returned to Canada, obtaining her B.Ed from the University of Toronto in 1992. She then taught elementary Language Arts in Seoul, Korea for one year and traveled throughout eastern Asia. Currently she is enrolled in the Ph.D. program in clinical psychology at the University of Windsor. She is married and has a son who was born in 1997.