

# Parental Conditional Regard as a Predictor of Deficiencies in Young Children's Capacities to Respond to Sad Feelings

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This study explored the relationship between parents' use of conditional regard (PCR, Assor, Roth, & Deci, 2004; Roth, 2008) to promote suppression of sad feelings and the following emotional skills in young children: (1) recognition of sadness in facial expressions, (2) awareness of sad feelings in oneself, and (3) empathic response to others' sad feelings. The study distinguished between two PCR components: conditional negative regard (similar to love withdrawal) and conditional positive regard. Emotion-focused interviews were conducted with 102 children aged 5–6 years, and their parents completed questionnaires assessing parents' use of conditional regard. As expected, both PCR components correlated negatively with the emotional skills. Regression analyses showed that the seemingly benign practice of conditional positive regard had unique negative associations with the three emotional skills also when effects of negative PCR were controlled. Copyright © 2010 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

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Research on affective development has shown that young children can develop various emotional skills or capacities that have important psychological functions (e.g. Saarni, Campos, Camras, & Witherington, 2006). Studies have also demonstrated that parental attitudes and behaviors that communicate acceptance of children's emotional experiences promote children's emotional competence, whereas parents' attitudes and behaviors communicating a lack of acceptance or dismissal of children's emotional experiences impede the development of emotional capacities (e.g. Saarni *et al.*, 2006; Thompson, 2006; Thompson, Laible, & Ontai, 2003). For example, Eisenberg *et al.* (1996) reported that mothers' punitive responses to children's emotions were negatively associated to

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children's constructive coping with their negative affects. Denham (1999) and Eisenberg, Cumberland, and Spinrad's (1998) review of research indicated that children cope more adaptively and constructively with their emotions when parents respond acceptingly and supportively to their negative emotional displays.

Gottman, Katz, and Hooven (1996) distinguished between 'emotion-coaching' and 'emotion-dismissing' parenting styles. Emotion-coaching parents are attentive to their own emotions and to their child's feelings and they believe that feelings should not be stifled. They consider their child's expression of emotion as an opportunity to validate the child's feeling and to teach the child about emotions, expression, and coping. The dismissing parents, on the contrary, view emotions as dangerous, and focus on avoiding and minimizing them. Several studies have tested the links between coaching and dismissive parenting styles and children's emotional functioning. Gottman *et al.* (1996) found that emotion-coaching parenting predicted children's capacity to regulate emotions. Katz and Hunter (2007) found that mother's emotion coaching was associated with fewer depressive symptoms, higher self-esteem, and fewer externalizing problems in young adolescents. Finally, Lunkenheimer, Shields, and Cortina (2007) found that emotion-dismissing parenting was a risk factor, contributing to poorer emotion regulation and more behavioral problems. Emotion-coaching parenting was found to interact with emotion dismissing such that it protected children from the detrimental effects of Emotion dismissing. John and Gross (2004) suggested that emotion-dismissing parenting should promote suppression of emotional expression, but this notion was not tested empirically.

Mayer and Salovey (1997) suggested that parents have a central role in promoting the development of affective skills and knowledge in their children. They proposed that parents who suppress and/or ignore their own negative emotions will be less sensitive to their children's negative affects and thus will have fewer opportunities to help their children discern and name their own emotions, as well as to discern and recognize emotions in others. Focusing mainly on the precursors of empathic involvement with other children, Strayer and Roberts (2004) found that parents who were more controlling subsequently had children who were angrier and less empathic.

Finally, a number of studies have indicated that children who were abused by their parents showed deficits in their understanding of the links between facial expression and emotion, and in discriminating various emotions' expressions (e.g. Camras, Grow, & Ribordy, 1983; Casey, 1996; Pollak, Cicchetti, Hornung, & Reed, 2000; Shipman, Zeman, Penza, & Champion, 2000).

Consistent with this general pattern, the present research focused on a parental practice that could be expected to undermine young children's emotional competence because it might reflect an emotion-dismissing parenting as defined by Gottman *et al.* (1996). This practice is: parental conditional regard (PCR; Assor, Roth, & Deci, 2004; Assor, Roth, Israeli, Freed, & Deci, 2007; Roth, 2008; Roth, Assor, Niemiec, Ryan, & Deci, 2009) that until now was only examined via adults' or adolescents' reports of their parents' behaviors.

In PCR, the parent provides more affection and appreciation than usual when the child meets parents' expectations (for example, suppresses her negative emotions), and less affection and appreciation when the child does not. Based on self-determination theory (SDT; Ryan & Deci, 2000) it was hypothesized and demonstrated that conditional regard is a controlling parental practice that predicts shallow internalization (i.e. introjection), controlled motivation, and controlled behavior (Assor *et al.*, 2004; Roth, 2008; Roth *et al.*, 2009). Furthermore,

Assor *et al.* (2004) have demonstrated that PCR is domain specific, so that parents who make their regard contingent on the child's behavior in one domain (e.g. academic achievement) do not necessarily use the practice of conditional regard in another domain (e.g. prosocial behavior). Specifically, in the domain of emotion regulation Assor *et al.* (2004) have shown, in reports by a sample of American college students, that when parents were perceived as hinging their regard on the child's suppression of feelings of sadness, fear, and anger, children indeed tended to suppress and ignore their negative emotions. Roth, Assor, and Eliot (2004) replicated the above pattern in a sample of reports by Israeli college students, for the emotions of sadness and fear. As the tendency to suppress and ignore one's own negative emotions is likely to lead to poor awareness of these emotions, it is reasonable to assume that parents' use of conditional regard to promote their children's emotion suppression would be likely to be associated with poor awareness of negative emotions in children. However, this association has yet to be examined directly.

Roth *et al.* (2004) also demonstrated that perceived parental use of conditional regard to promote their children's suppression of feelings of sadness and fear also predicted two additional emotional propensities in children. First, perceived PCR predicted college students' poor recognition of emotions, as assessed by the emotion recognition test in the emotional intelligence test developed by Mayer, Caruso, and Salovey (2000), a test assessing recognition of emotion in facial displays and personal monologues. It may be speculated that children's lack of recognition of negative emotions allows them to minimize the expression of these 'dangerous' emotions and hence avoid unpleasant parental responses. Second, greater perceived PCR aimed at promoting emotion suppression also correlated with college students' lower disclosure of personal difficulties and less empathic support for their partner when that partner experienced difficulties (Roth *et al.*, 2004). It may be conjectured that children have lower capacities for empathy and sympathy regarding negative emotions because they were trained to dismiss such emotions in themselves. Thus, PCR for the suppression of negative emotions in children may reflect emotion-dismissing parenting as defined by Gottman *et al.* (1996).

The findings concerning the correlates of PCR in the emotion regulation domain, together with the work pertaining to parental antecedents of emotional skills in young children, suggest that parents' use of conditional regard to promote children's suppression of negative feelings may be associated with impaired development in at least three specific emotional skills: (a) the capacity to recognize negative emotions in others, (b) an awareness of negative emotions in oneself, and (c) empathic (sympathetic) responses to others' negative emotional experiences.

Thus, we hypothesized that those young children whose parents hinge their affection on children's suppression of negative emotions would find it difficult to recognize negative emotions in others and in themselves. In addition, we predicted that these children would also be less likely to be aware of negative emotions in themselves. Finally, we hypothesized that these children would be more likely to reveal difficulties in empathizing or sympathizing with others' sadness or fear.

Although research studies on PCR in young adults and on emotional skills in young children are consistent with the above hypotheses, at present there is no direct evidence supporting them for children. Moreover, extant research has only assessed parents' use of conditional regard via offspring reports.

Finally, only one published study has attempted to assess the differential effects of the two components of PCR; that is, conditional positive regard rather

than conditional negative regard (Roth *et al.*, 2009). Thus, following the well-established distinction between approach and avoidance motivations (e.g. Elliot, 1999), it might be possible to distinguish between two kinds of PCR. Parental conditional positive regard (PCPR) involves providing more affection and appreciation than usual when the child meets parents' expectations. Parental conditional negative regard (PCNR) involves providing less affection and appreciation when the child does not comply with parents' expectations and is quite similar to the well-known practice of love withdrawal (e.g. Hoffman, 1970; Sears, Maccoby, & Levin, 1957)

Writers discussing parental practices involving PCNR (i.e. love withdrawal) generally agree that such practices have serious negative effects for child's well-being (Aronfreed, 1968; Assor *et al.*, 2004; Barber, Stolz, & Olsen, 2005; Elliot & Thrash, 2004; Grolnick, 2003; Hoffman, 1970; Roth, 2008; Sears *et al.*, 1957). However, opinions differ with regard to the desirability of PCPR. From a behaviorist perspective, PCPR can be viewed as an effective and desirable practice that reinforces parentally valued behaviors (e.g. Gewirtz & Pelaez-Nogueras, 1991; McDowell, 1988). Interestingly, some forms of PCPR are also recommended by various parent guidance or education books and articles (e.g. Latham, 1994; Steinberg, 2004). On the contrary, humanistic approaches (e.g. Rogers, 1951; Ryan & Deci, 2000) and some object-relation theorists (e.g. Miller, 1981) view the use of PCPR to control children as detrimental to children's psychological growth, because it involves coercion and fragile self-esteem (Assor *et al.*, 2004; Rogers, 1951; Roth, 2008; Roth *et al.*, 2009). Thus, as a result of PCPR, the children might feel that they have to follow parental expectations in order to maintain parental love.

Based on the self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2008) Roth *et al.* (2009) hypothesized that PCPR would predict suppression of negative emotions through shallow internalization (i.e. *introjection*, indexed by feelings of internal compulsion to suppress negative emotions) and PCNR would predict dis-regulation through defiance. The results support the hypothesis suggesting that PCNR results in children's behavior that does not correspond to parents' expectations, whereas PCPR results in children's attempt to meet parents' expectations but out of a rigid and shallow type of internalization (or behavioral regulation).

Substantial research has supported the idea that controlling practices, including praise that implies evaluation (Ryan, 1982) or implicates the person's worth (Dweck, 1999), can have negative consequences, including behaviors that are less flexible, less intrinsically motivated, and less conducive to high quality performance (Benware & Deci, 1984; Kamins & Dweck, 1999). However, besides the Roth *et al.* (2009) study, the present research is the first to examine whether the seemingly more benign practice of PCPR, when applied to the domain of emotion regulation, is associated with negative correlates in children. Unlike Roth *et al.* (2009) that studied adolescents' perceptions of their parents, the present study explores 5- to 6-year-old children and use parents' reports of PCPR and PCNR. Specifically, we examined whether parents who use conditional affection and attention to promote the suppression of negative emotions in young children have children with less-developed emotional skills. The relationship between parents' use of conditional regard and children's emotional skills will be assessed while controlling for the effect of PCNR. Thus, we also hypothesized that PCPR would have a unique effect of showing poor recognition, lack of awareness, and lack of empathic response. Moreover, based on Roth *et al.* (2009), in which PCPR predicted rigid compliance whereas PCNR predicted defiance, we expected that PCPR towards suppression of negative emotions would be

a stronger predictor of children's lack of awareness (which is a surrogate for suppression) than PCNR. Thus, based on these past findings, we hypothesized that PCPR would be a stronger predictor of children's engagement with parental expectations.

### *The Present Study*

This study investigated the relationship between parents' self-reported use of PCPR and PCNR to promote sadness suppression on the one hand and three emotional skills of their kindergarten age children on the other. We focused on the emotion of sadness because research (Roberts & Strayer, 1996; Strayer & Roberts, 1997) and our pilot work have shown that sadness is easier to identify and generate than fear. The emotion of anger was discarded because it is not likely to lead to empathic responses.

We hypothesized that parents' reports of PCPR and PCNR would be negatively related to the following three skills in their 5- to 6-year-old children: (1) recognition of sadness in a picture of another child, (2) awareness of sadness in oneself, and (3) empathic (sympathetic) response to another child's sadness. In testing the hypotheses, we controlled for potential effects of children's temperament-related tendency to express negative emotions.

## METHOD

### *Participants*

Participants were 102 children (50% girls) from six kindergartens located in four Israeli cities, along with their parents (102 mothers and 94 fathers). Children were 5–6 years of age ( $M = 5.3$ ). Mothers' ages ranged from 25 to 49 years ( $M = 36.8$ ) and fathers' ages ranged from 29 to 57 years ( $M = 40.9$ ). According to the Israeli Ministry of Education, these kindergartens serve mostly middle- and lower-middle class populations.

### *Procedure*

Parental consent was gained according to the guidelines of the Ministry of Education, and all parents approved their children's participation. The research was approved by the Ben-Gurion University institutional review board (IRB) and by the Israeli Ministry of Education. A trained research assistant interviewed each child for 15 min in a quiet room at the kindergarten. Two photographs were presented to the children, one represented sadness and the other represented fear (the emotion of fear was represented for purposes that are not discussed in the present report). Among other questions, the children were asked what emotion (viz., sadness) a child in a photograph was feeling, whether they ever felt like that, and how they would respond to another child in the class who felt this way. Parent questionnaires were sent by mail and were returned by the parents in sealed envelopes. Mothers and fathers were asked to complete the questionnaire independently, reporting on the extent to which they use positive and negative conditional regard when their child expresses sadness. Parents also reported on their child's temperament and his or her inclination to suppress or express sadness, and they completed a social desirability scale. To encourage full participation, a lecture for parents (and teachers) on the research was delivered

subsequent to the parents' participation, and a gift worth about \$100 was provided to each participating kindergarten. The kindergarten teacher reminded the parents to complete the questionnaires, collected them and sent them to the researchers. Ninety-three percent of the forms were returned.

### **Measures**

#### *Parent-reported PCPR and PCNR regarding children's sadness experience*

There were two stems pertaining to the child's sadness experience, with one stem for PCNR and one for PCPR. Each stem was followed by three items to which the parents responded. The stem for PCNR was as follows: 'Try to recall times in which your child felt and expressed sadness (cried or expressed it verbally). How do you respond at times like that?' This stem was followed by three responses, for example: 'I ignore him for a while'. The stem for PCPR was: 'Try to recall times in which your child appeared to feel sadness, but she/he avoided expressing or sharing it. How do you respond at times like that?' This stem was also followed by three responses, for example: 'I show him/her that I love him/her more.' Parents responded on a five-point scale ranging from Never (1) to Always (5), and scores were averaged to form the PCNR and PCPR indices.

The construct validity of the measures was examined with factor analyses, computation of Cronbach alphas, and correlations between the two scales. Factor analyses were performed separately for fathers and mothers, with varimax rotation. Results showed that PCNR and PCPR factors emerged clearly, for fathers and for mothers, with eigenvalues ranging from 1.18 to 2.74. Every item loaded on the appropriate factor, and the loadings were all high and unique (above 0.64 for fathers and above 0.66 for mothers). The factors extracted for mothers accounted for 62.5% of the variance and for fathers 68.3%. Cronbach alphas for mothers were 0.70 for PCNR and 0.66 for PCPR. Cronbach alphas for fathers were 0.76 for PCNR and 0.84 for PCPR. The correlation between the maternal scales was 0.37 ( $p < 0.01$ ) and between paternal scales was 0.36 ( $p < 0.01$ ). The correlations between mothers and fathers were 0.35 ( $p < 0.01$ ) for PCNR and 0.48 ( $p < 0.01$ ) for PCPR. Overall, the results support the distinction between PCNR and PCPR.

#### *Parents' reports of social desirability*

A 15-item version of Crowne and Marlowe's (1964) scale was used to control for participants' tendency to report dishonestly about the sensitive issues examined in this research. A sample item was: 'No matter who I am talking to I am always a good listener'. Cronbach alpha for this sample was 0.76.

#### *Child interview assessing children's sadness recognition, sadness awareness, and empathic response*

This interview was adapted from a child interview developed by Cassidy, Parke, Butkovsky, & Braungart (1992). Participants first looked carefully at photographs of a same-sex child expressing sadness. Photographs were selected by a group of educational and developmental psychology faculty and graduate students, who identified them as clear exemplars of the emotions. Then, participants answered questions aimed at capturing the three conceptual categories of interest: (a) sadness recognition ('how do you think this child is feeling?'); (b) sadness awareness ('do you ever feel like this?' and then, 'could you think about any examples?'); and (c) empathic responsiveness to another child's sadness

('if you saw another child looking this way, *how would you feel?*' and 'if you saw another child looking this way, *what would you do?*').

Responses were coded to indicate the child's recognition of sadness, awareness of sadness, and empathic responsiveness to another child's sadness. Sadness recognition was assessed using a three-point scale: (1) the child does not recognize sadness, (2) recognizes emotion or an experience that is close to sadness ('the child feels bad'), (3) and clearly recognizes sadness. High scores on sadness awareness were based on whether the child admitted that she/he ever experienced sadness. There were two possible answers: A low score was given if the child said she/he never felt sad. A high score was given if the child said that there were times when she/he felt sad. High scores on empathic responsiveness were coded for responses that included feeling sad or feeling a related emotion (e.g. sorrow) when witnessing a sad child in kindergarten, together with a behavior expressing an effort to alleviate the child's sadness (e.g. approaching the child to help; talking to the kindergarten teacher and telling her that the child looks sad'). It is important to note that not recognizing sadness at the first stage of the interview did not affect the other two stages (i.e. sadness awareness and empathy). Thus, the children were asked about their sadness experiences and their responses to other children's sadness following the emotion recognition task independently of the quality of their recognition. Detailed coding guidelines are available from the first author.

Four coders, who were blind to information about the children, coded interviews from verbatim transcripts. Each coder received half of the interviews; thus, each interview was coded by two independent coders. Kappas, tapping inter-coder agreement for each question, ranged from 0.77 to 1.0. The score on empathic response to others' sadness was the mean of two relevant questions ('... how would you feel?' and '... what would you do?'). A correlation of 0.66 ( $p < 0.01$ ) emerged between the two questions, providing empirical support for combining the two responses. The correlation between awareness and recognition was 0.35 ( $p < 0.01$ ), the correlations between awareness and empathic response towards others' sadness were 0.30 ( $p < 0.01$ ), and the correlations between recognition and empathy were 0.18 ( $p < 0.08$ ).

#### *Mother reports of child's emotional negativity in the first 2 years of life*

Parents' success in leading their child to suppress negative emotions might be influenced by the child's emotional negativity, that is, the child's temperamental tendency to express negative emotions often and intensely. Thus, we controlled for this tendency using mothers' reports. A subscale from the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL: Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1981) was modified for the present research. Four items were used, which mothers rated as 0 = not true, 1 = somewhat or sometimes true, or 2 = very or often true during the first 2 years of child's life. The items were as follows: 'cries much', 'nervous', 'anxious', and 'worried'. The alpha coefficient of the scale was 0.82.

## RESULTS

Table 1 presents correlations testing the hypothesis that PCPR and PCNR oriented towards sadness suppression would relate negatively to sadness recognition, sadness awareness, and empathic response towards others' sadness. Children's temperamental tendency towards emotional negativity (not presented

Table 1. Correlations of parental positive conditional regard and parental negative conditional regard toward sadness with children's sadness variables

Parent reports	Child reports		
	Sadness recognition	Awareness of sadness	Empathic response
Mother			
Positive regard	-0.24*	-0.20*	-0.24*
Negative regard	-0.16 <sup>†</sup>	-0.16 <sup>†</sup>	-0.15 <sup>†</sup>
Father			
Positive regard	-0.28*	-0.18*	-0.26*
Negative regard	-0.15 <sup>†</sup>	-0.05	-0.17 <sup>†</sup>

\* $p < 0.05$ , <sup>†</sup> $p < 0.1$ , marginally significant.

Table 2. Multiple regression analyses with parental positive conditional regard and parental negative conditional regard as predictors of children's sadness variables

Parent reports	Child reports		
	Sadness recognition	Awareness of sadness	Empathic response
Mother			
Positive regard	-0.22*	-0.18 <sup>†</sup>	-0.19*
Negative regard	-0.05	-0.09	0.06
$R^2$	0.09	0.06	0.07
Father			
Positive regard	-0.26*	-0.18 <sup>†</sup>	-0.18 <sup>†</sup>
Negative regard	-0.04	0.06	0.06
$R^2$	0.11	0.06	0.07

Note: The table presents beta coefficients. \* $p < 0.05$ , <sup>†</sup> $p < 0.1$ , marginally significant.

in the table) was found to be correlated only with parent reports of PCPR and PCNR (for mothers:  $r = 0.27$ ,  $p < 0.01$  for PCPR and  $r = 0.29$ ,  $p < 0.01$  for PCNR; for fathers:  $r = 0.24$ ,  $p < 0.05$  for PCPR and  $r = 0.34$ ,  $p < 0.01$  for PCNR). Therefore, we controlled for the emotional negativity variance for these variables. The social desirability measure used for parents was not correlated with any of the variables tested in the present study.

Table 1 reveals that, as expected, all the correlations were negative. In general, the correlations of children's emotional capacities with PCPR tended to be stronger than the correlations with PCNR for which the correlations were, in most cases, only marginally significant. Thus, in line with the prediction, it seems that PCPR is a stronger predictor of children's lack of awareness and also with lack of recognition and lack of empathy. To test this hypothesis directly, we conducted multiple regression analyses with children's emotional functioning regressed onto PCNR and PCPR simultaneously. The results of the regression analyses, presented in Table 2, show that, as expected, in all cases PCPR was superior to PCNR in predicting children's outcomes. PCPR had significant or marginally unique effects on children's outcomes, whereas PCNR had no unique effects.<sup>1</sup>



## DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to explore the relationship between PCR and children's emotional functioning. The findings reveal that parents distinguish between PCPR and PCNR. This finding is in line with the distinction that was made by adolescents' perceptions of PCPR and PCNR in Roth *et al.* (2009) studies. In addition, results were consistent with the hypothesis that both types of PCR that were intended to promote minimization of children's sadness expressions were related to children's lower ability to recognize sadness in other children, to respond to them when others were sad, and to be aware of their own sadness. It seems reasonable to assume that parents who wish their children to minimize sadness expressions do not necessarily wish for poor recognition of sadness in others and for poor empathy; however, it seems that these two deficiencies are predicted by the attempt to shape children's sadness suppression by using contingent regard.

The present results support and extend past research. The negative relationship between PCR and awareness of sadness confirms Eisenberg *et al.*'s (1996) finding that parental minimizing reactions to children's emotions were positively associated with children's avoidant coping. The negative association between PCR and recognition of sadness confirms Roth *et al.*'s (2004) finding that young adults' perception of PCR is negatively associated with their recognition of emotions. Finally, the negative association between both components of PCR and empathy validates Strayer and Roberts's (2004) research finding that a controlling style of parenting is linked to low empathy in children as well as Roth's (2008) research finding regarding the negative relationship between PCR and empathic concern.

Most of the past research did not distinguish between PCPR and PCNR and treated them as a unified concept; however, the present study demonstrates that the strongest relation with children's outcomes exists for PCPR rather than PCNR. The finding that PCPR is more effective than PCNR in predicting children's behavior is not surprising, because positive rewards (i.e. providing more affection than usual when the child meets parents' expectations) were found to be more effective than punishments (i.e. love withdrawal) in predicting child's internalization (Hoffman, 1970). However, based on self-determination theory, we considered PCPR to be a controlling parental practice, and thus we hypothesized its relation to negative feelings. Hence, we speculate that the relationship among PCR, internal compulsion, anxiety before performance, shame and guilt after failure, and fluctuation in self-esteem, as reported by Assor *et al.* (2004), might be the primary result of PCPR. Indeed, Roth *et al.* (2009) found that PCPR is correlated to internal compulsion, whereas PCNR is correlated to feeling of resentment towards parents. However, more research is necessary to understand the pros and cons of providing children with conditional positive regard. This question is of special importance because, contrary to our assumption, many parenting books recommend praising and rewarding children when they meet parents' expectations (e.g. Latham, 1994; Steinberg, 2004), which coincides with the beliefs of many parents who think that their children will benefit from the contingent provision of more affection than usual when the children live up to parental standards.

The present research findings also reveal that PCNR did not predict children's outcomes when PCPR was controlled. We speculate that the additional negative emotions of rejection and resentment that may be generated by PCNR might make internalization of parental expectations difficult. Thus, the relationship between PCR, rejection, and resentment towards parents as reported by Assor

*et al.* (2004) might be the primary result of PCNR. Although we anticipated that suppression oriented PCPR would be more effective in predicting children's suppression than PCNR (i.e. lack of awareness) we did predict that PCNR would be correlated with children's emotional deficiencies even when controlling for PCPR. Thus, if children feel rejected by their parents, and angry towards them, as well as not regulating their emotions adaptively (Roth *et al.*, 2009) one may expect that they might fail to recognize emotions in other children and fail to be empathic. Hence, the correlations were found to be in the hypothesized direction, but while controlling for PCPR, the unique effects became marginally zero. Past research found positive relationship between PCNR and negative outcomes such as internal compulsion, resentment towards parents, and dysregulation (Roth *et al.*, 2009); but research did not find any relationship between PCNR and positive outcomes such as adaptive regulation and sense of choice with regard to the regulation of emotions. Given the positive outcomes explored in the present research (awareness and empathy), future research should add negative outcomes such as dysregulation and antisocial behavior in order to provide a more comprehensive description of the characteristics of the PCNR's correlates.

The finding that there is no relationship between PCNR towards suppression of sadness and children's awareness of their own sadness (while controlling for PCPR) is of special interest. This finding reveals that shaping children's behavior by using PCNR might backfire, that is, might not promote children's engagement in parentally desired behaviors (Given that low awareness seems to be a surrogate for suppression). Future research should explore this assumption directly.

Although the research is based on a relatively small sample, the findings of this study are particularly important because they were based on parents' own reports of PCR rather than children's retrospective self-reports, thus validating relations found in previous studies that involved children's perceptions of PCR. Further, the negative consequences of PCR were found here with 5- to 6-year-old children. Thus, among the strengths of this research are its multiple informants and its control over children's temperamental emotional negativity; therefore, despite its cross-sectional methodology, relatively little variance in the key findings could be attributed to method variance. Further studies could examine the current issues with longitudinal data and experimental designs. Studies implementing objective observations of behavior would also be useful. An important limitation of the current study is its limited measure of awareness, which might be partly confounded with emotion recognition. Future research on the relationship between parenting and awareness of one's emotions should use an elaborated measure.

Finally, a large body of research, as earlier described, has found emotion suppression to be associated with problematic psychological and behavioral outcomes; thus, it is possible to claim that the problematic outcomes of suppression-oriented PCR (i.e. lack of recognition and empathy) might result merely from the parental encouragement of emotion suppression and not from the socializing method used by the parents to facilitate suppression (i.e. PCR). Therefore, future research should distinguish between the content to be adopted by the child and the socializing practice enacted to promote it. It seems that the strongest test for poor effectiveness of socialization practices is when they are oriented towards more desirable outcomes such as expression of negative emotions in times of need. Future research would do well to explore this issue.

In summary, PCPR and PCNR were found to be negatively related to three emotional skills in children: sadness recognition, awareness of sadness, and empathy. Past research has provided ample evidence that consistent

minimization of negative emotion often has negative psychological, physiological, and interpersonal consequences (e.g. Gross & John, 2003); moreover, Ryan, Deci, Grolnick, & LaGuardia (2006) argued that suppressed emotions have been implicated in various forms of psychopathology. Therefore, it is important to explore possible antecedents of children's emotional abilities. The current study explored parental antecedents of children's emotional skills, and future research should continue in this attempt, together with the investigation of alternative parental practices that might result in greater emotional competence, such as autonomy support (Grolnick, 2003; Grolnick, Deci, & Ryan, 1997), emotion-coaching parenting (Gottman *et al.*, 1996; Gottman, Katz, & Hooven, 1997), and parent-child elaborative conversational style (Thompson *et al.*, 2003).

### Note

1. The result of dividing the sample into two (for girls and boys), in order to test these associations separately for the four combinations of gender of parent and gender of child, are excessively small samples, although the trends are consistent all across the groups.

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