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# Culture, Emotional Expression and Parental Socialization Strategies among Two-year-old Israeli Toddlers

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## Introduction

One of the most important developments in childhood is the development of emotional expression and its regulation. The capacity for the deliberate modulation of one's behavior and emotion develops mainly in the second year, and it is considered a key developmental milestone that markedly transforms the child's ability to function in the social environment (Kochanska, Coy, & Murray, 2001; Maccoby, 2007).

Social norms, established by culture, dictate how, where, when and to whom specific emotions are expressed (Garrett-Peters & Fox, 2007). These norms are specific rules taught in a specific culture and dictate which emotional expressions are socially desirable in certain social contexts, and are the basis for emotional regulation (Ekman & Friesen, 1975; Matsumoto, 1990). Previous studies have shown that there are cultural differences in emotional expression among various cultures (*e.g.*, Garrett-Peters & Fox, 2007).

The present study compares the type and intensity of the child's emotional expression and parental practices of socialization in two ethnic groups: Israeli Jews and Arabs. This comparison was aimed to contribute to the existing scientific knowledge in this field, and provide insight into the differences and similarities between the ethnic models of emotions, as well as the practices of socialization strategies regarding regulating emotions and emotional behavior of children.

## The Israeli context

Israel is a multicultural society that includes different sectors and subgroups (Khalidi, 1985; Smooha & Peretz, 1982). According to the Central Bureau of Statistics (2009), 75% of Israeli citizens are Jewish, and 20% are Arabs. These two subgroups are characterized by different cultural and educational emphasis (Khalidi, 1985; Smooha & Peretz, 1982; Haj-Yahia 2000; Haj-Yahia, 2002; Cohen 2007).

In the last decade of the 20th century, due to a massive exposure to international media, the system of values in Israel has westernized (Sagy, Orr, & Bar-On, 1999). Hence, Israeli society is considered today an individualistic one, ranked 19th among 74 countries in the index of individualism (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). In contrast, these researchers view the Arab culture as a collectivist culture that favors prolonged commitment to similar group members who are defined by the family and the nuclear fam-



ily. Also, Dwairy (2004a) views the Arab society in Israel as a collective one, based on social roles and authoritarian hierarchy that are determined by gender and age. However, Oyserman, Coon, & Kimmelmeier (2002) claimed that the Arab society in Israel is undergoing a change and involves both western individualistic values and the values of collectivism. Accordingly, the combination of both systems of values in that society creates a “dual culture” that on the one hand, is based on keeping tradition and on the other hand, on adopting individualistic values.

Based on Hofstede’s four common dimensions approach for explaining the differences between cultures, Cohen (2006) showed that in comparison to the Jewish culture, the Arab culture scored higher on power distance, collectivism, and masculinity. Furthermore, Dwairy (2004b) claimed that in the Arab culture, discipline is seen as a positive value, and children are educated to maintain respect and acceptance in front of their parents, and are expected to adhere to the expectations of their parents.

Among the Arab population in Israel, traditional and authoritarian family values are common (Haj-Yahia, 2000; Haj-Yahia, 2002; Cohen 2007). Hence, parents tend to be collective and authoritarian, as well as emphasize obedience, discipline and an appropriate way of life leading to behavioral aspects that promote the collective harmony and welfare. Accordingly, the socialization process of children relies on punishment and imposition of values, norms and behaviors (Khoury, 2010; Dwairy, 2004b).

In contrast, the Jewish population is characterized by values of the western family (Mikulincer, Weller, & Florian, 1993). Hence, parents in the Jewish culture, which is considered more liberal and individualistic (Cohen, 2007), tend to enable their children relatively more freedom and encourage their individuality and separateness (Dwairy & Achoui, 2006). Furthermore, the Jewish society tends to emphasize the nuclear family and the independence of family members, compared to the collective families in the Arab society, which emphasize the extended family, dependency and mutual partnership (Haj-Yahia, 1995; Haj-Yahia, 2000).

In a study comparing Israeli Jewish and Palestinian Arab toddlers and their parents (Feldman, Masalha & Alony, 2006), the findings showed that Israeli Jewish toddlers were better able to mobilize actions (*e.g.*, “completes chores willingly”, “helps others when asked”, “moves smoothly between activities”, and “persists in activities”) and to respond to adults’ requests, whereas Palestinian toddlers were more competent at inhibiting prohibited actions (*e.g.*, “tolerates frustration” and “regulates emotions”). These differences are consistent with the value placed on agency in individualistic societies and on deference to authority in collectivistic contexts, and underscore the specific ways parents socialize children in their cultural ecology.

In light of various findings presented above, showing the different cultural orientations between Arab and Jewish societies, one might conclude that the co-existence of two culturally separate populations in Israel provides a valuable framework for the in-



investigation of cultural differences in emotional expression and regulation, as well as in socialization strategies.

### **Cultural differences in emotional expression**

Emotional expression is defined as a verbal or non-verbal behavior used primarily as a means of expression and a reflection of the inner emotional experience (Hess & Thibault, 2009). Emotional expression may occur consciously or unconsciously, it is partly controlled and contains different levels of intentions (Kennedy-Moore & Watson, 1999).

One important component of the emotional regulation is the intensity in which the emotion is expressed (Suveg & Zeman, 2010). Murphy and Eisenberg (1996) found that ratings of children's emotional intensity were negatively correlated with their social competence. Additionally, children who were rated highly in emotional intensity were relatively low in peer-rated social status and observer-rated social skills (Eisenberg, Fabes, Bernzweig, Karbon, Poulin & Hanish, 1993). In contrast, other data suggested that children, who were well regulated and controlled in their emotional responses, were engaged in more socially appropriate interactions with their peers than children who were less well regulated (Fabes, Carlo, Kupanoff & Laible, 1999).

The connections between cultural norms and emotional expressions, particularly emotional intensity, might reflect the importance of socialization influences. Thus, if individuals have learned that specific emotions are desirable, they are free to feel these emotions intensely. However, if they have learned that specific emotions are undesirable or inappropriate, they might have learned to regulate these feelings (Eid & Diener, 2001).

Views differ on the extent to which emotions and aspects of emotions are universal or socially constructed (*e.g.*, Ekman, 1994). Various studies have shown that the patterns of emotional expression are not universal, and culture has a significant role in shaping the emotional expression of individuals, and that culture constitutes a source of differences in children's emotional behavior.

### **Powerful and powerless negative emotions**

In the present study, a distinction was made between powerful emotions that display power and assertiveness, such as anger, disgust and contempt, and powerless emotions that imply internal blame, vulnerability, and inability to cope with negative events, such as sadness, fear, shame, and guilt (Fischer *et al.*, 2004). Studies revealed that norms regarding expression of these emotions may differ in individualistic versus collectivist cultures (Timmers, Fischer, & Manstead, 1998).

Hence, in individualistic cultures, anger is considered functional as long as it is expressed in socially appropriate ways, and it is perceived as a way to keep the interests of individuals and their rights and freedom (Eid & Diener, 2001). However, the expression of anger is less acceptable in collectivist cultures since it threatens the hierarchical structure and the harmony in relationships (Miyake & Yamazaki, 1995). Additionally, since contempt and disgust are less ego-focused but have a similar functional quality



of threatening the social harmony such as anger, these feelings are also less tolerated in collectivistic cultures. Accordingly, it was found that these three powerful emotions were expressed in the individualistic cultures of Canada and the U.S significantly more than in the collectivist culture of Japan (Safdar *et al.*, 2009).

In contrast, as powerless emotions are less threatening the harmony of the group compared to powerful emotions, they may be more acceptable in collectivist cultures than in individualistic ones. This line of reasoning is supported by the findings reported by Matsumoto and colleagues (Matsumoto *et al.*, 1998), that showed that American participants exerted more control over the expressions of fear and sadness, but less control over anger, contempt and disgust comparing to participants from collectivist societies, such as South Korea and Russia.

In conclusion, powerful emotions are more common in individualistic cultures, while powerless emotions are prevalent in the collectivistic ones; moreover, Bashir (2013) examined cultural differences in emotional expression between Arab and Jewish children, and showed that Arab children expressed more sadness than Jewish children in a frustrating task. This finding was explained based on the functional theory (Barrett & Campos, 1991), which claims that each emotion has its own unique function in the social context. The functional role of sadness changes among different cultures, hence in collectivist cultures its role has no threat on the group harmony and it is considered a submissive and non aggressive negative emotion.

### **Socialization of emotional expression and regulation**

Parents are highly effective in scaffolding emotional behaviors of infants and young children (*e.g.*, Campos *et al.*, 2003), and emotion-related socialization is possible even in the first days of life, given newborns' vocal and facial recognition abilities (Mastropieri & Turkewitz, 1999) and infants' early differential recognition and responsiveness to caregivers' facial expressions soon thereafter (*e.g.*, Nielsen, 2006; Weir, Toland, King, & Martin, 2005).

One of the ways for socializing emotional expression in children is through the responses of others in emotional situations. Hence, Parents' emotional reactions establish socialization in their children's emotional expression through mimicking emotional behaviors, exposing children to a range of emotions, and providing a feedback on children's behavior and emotions (Grusec & Hastings, 2007).

To measure parental socialization strategies of emotion, most studies within and outside the U.S. used the CCNES questionnaire (Coping with Children's Negative Emotion Scale; Fabes, Eisenberg, & Bernzweig, 1990), which was developed based on an American theory and research perspective (Friedlmeier, Corapci & Cole, 2011). The questionnaire identifies mothers' encouraging and discouraging responses in dealing with their children's negative emotions in various situations.

The CCNES scale (Fabes *et al.*, 1990) was designed to assess the typical respons-



es of parents to their young children's (preschool or early elementary school) negative emotions. This self-report scale presents parents with 12 hypothetical scenarios, divided into situations evoking powerless emotions such as upset, and situations evoking powerful emotions such as anger. These hypothetical situations represent common emotionally evocative events that young children are exposed to. Parents are asked to rate (or describe in an interview), the likelihood of their response to the scenario in each of 6 possible ways, with each of them represents different ways of responding to children's negative emotions. The answers delineate different responses that parents might employ when exposed to their young children's negative emotions. 3 of these responses are considered supportive of child's emotional expression, and the remaining 3 are considered non-supportive.

It is agreed that socialization processes occur within the context of cultural systems that define the very nature of infants' and young children's emotional experience, expression, and understanding. Culture has been conceptualized as a developmental niche in which children acquire knowledge and skills. The developmental niche includes the physical and social features of the child's setting, the community's child-care and child-rearing customs, and caregivers' beliefs about child development (Valsiner, 2000). Although this cultural framework has not focused on emotional development, it follows that the developmental niche is a context in which culturally specific emotional reactions are acquired.

In line with the cultural norms mentioned above, it was found that Chinese parents supported suppression and minimization of emotions as an adaptive coping strategy, in contrast to western perspective of reaching psychological balance through emotional catharsis (Chen & Swartzman, 2001). Cross-cultural studies found among Chinese children that behavioral inhibition is seen by their parents as an achievement (Chen, Rubin, & Sun, 1992). In contrast, shy and restrained Canadian children experienced social difficulties, and their parents perceived their inhibition as a lack of social competence (Chen, Hastings, [Rubin](#), Chen, Cen & Stewart, 1998).

An additional study (Garrett-Peters & Fox, 2007) compared European American children and first generation Chinese American children in emotional reactions to a disappointing gift. As embedding cultural and social customs of another group is a gradual process, it was found that although the two groups represent different cultures, *i.e.*, individualistic and collectivist, emotional reactions among first generation of European immigration children resembled the emotional reactions of Chinese children (Chen *et al.*, 1998).

These findings emphasize the importance of culture in orienting mothers' responses to their child's emotions and directing the socialization strategies they use. Similarly, studies conclude that mothers in individualistic cultures use more supporting socialization strategies toward their children's emotional expression than mothers in collectivistic cultures.

Due to the differences between the systems of values of the two cultures, it can be concluded that cultures have different perceptions regarding emotions, which in turn affects the means of socialization of emotion. Therefore the hypotheses are:

1. Arab mothers will use more emotional suppression toward their children, while Jewish mothers will encourage their child's emotional expression.
2. Jewish children will express more emotions than their Arab counterparts.
3. Socialization strategies of encouragement and suppression of emotions will moderate intercultural differences in emotional expression.

## Method

### Participants

69 healthy two-year-olds and their mothers from the north and centre of Israel participated in the study. 35 were from the Arab sector and 34 were from the Jewish sector. Each group consisted of about half females and half males.

### Tools

To achieve equivalence between the versions of source and target languages, the tools that were not available in Arabic or Hebrew were translated in a back translation procedure from English into the requested language and then back into English. The translation was made by graduate students (Master's and PhD) with a high level of knowledge in both languages.

**Socio-demographic questionnaire:** The questionnaire was used to collect information regarding demographic characteristics of the mothers and their children, such as age, gender, place of living, religion, marital status, socioeconomic status, spouse's job if there is one, higher education level, *etc.*

**Interview of emotion socialization strategies (CCNES; Fabes *et al.*, 1990):** The purpose of the interview is to assess parental socialization strategies of the emotional expression of their children. The interview is based on 10 descriptions; each describes a situation in which the child experiences positive or negative emotions: 4 items describe powerless-negative emotions, 3 items describe powerful-negative emotions and 3 items describe positive emotions. The mothers were asked how they would react to the situation, and their answers were coded into 11 categories: Emotional reaction to their child's emotions; encouragement of emotional expression; emotion focused reactions; problems focused reactions; minimization; punishing reactions; non-acceptance of their child's emotion; ignorance of their child's emotion; causal reaction or providing information; giving in; and witnessing child's emotion. Response frequency was examined in each category, and the answers given by the mothers were ranked using supporting strategies (2-4) and non-supportive strategies (5-8).

**Emotional expression:** In order to assess children's emotional expression, an observation was made. The children and their mothers were asked to perform the cookie task,



which was videotaped. The cookie task is a task in which the children have to wait until they get a cookie, creating a frustrating situation. The observation lasted 4 minutes, which we divided into 48 intervals, and coded in each interval the kind of emotion expressed (sad, angry or positive emotion), and the intensity of positive and negative emotions (1-3). Inter coder reliability was 0.83 for the emotion coding and 0.8 for the intensity.

## Results

Regarding the first hypothesis addressing the differences between Arab and Jewish mothers in the socialization strategies: emotional encouragement or suppression, it was found that in powerless negative emotions, Jewish mothers used the socialization strategy encouragement of emotional expression significantly more than Arab mothers [ $F(1,65) = 8.27, p < 0.01$ ]. Furthermore, in powerful negative situations, it was found that Jewish mothers used more encouraging strategies for their child's emotional expression than Arab mothers [ $F(1,65) = 6.57, p < 0.05$ ]. It was also found that Jewish mothers used minimization more than Arab mothers [ $F(1,65) = 4.3, p < 0.05$ ], but Arab mothers used witnessing their child's emotion without intervention (which is considered a passive strategy), more than Jewish mothers [ $F(1,65) = 6.90, p < 0.01$ ]. However, no differences were found between the two groups in positive situations (results are shown below in tables 1 and 2).

**Table 1**

*Socialization strategies differences in powerless negative emotion*

| <b>Socialization strategy</b>            | <b>Results</b>                             |
|--|--|
| Emotional reaction to child's emotions   | N.S  |
| Encouragement of emotional expression    | Jewish > Arabs ( $F=8.27, \eta^2_p=.113$ ) |
| Emotion focused reactions                | N.S  |
| Problems focused reactions               | N.S  |
| Minimization                             | Jewish > Arabs ( $F=4.31, \eta^2_p=.062$ ) |
| Punishing reactions                      | N.S  |
| Non-acceptance of child emotion          | N.S  |
| Ignorance of child emotion               | N.S  |
| Causal reaction or providing information | N.S  |
| Giving in                                | N.S  |
| Witnessing child's emotion               | Arabs > Jewish ( $F=6.91, \eta^2_p=.096$ ) |

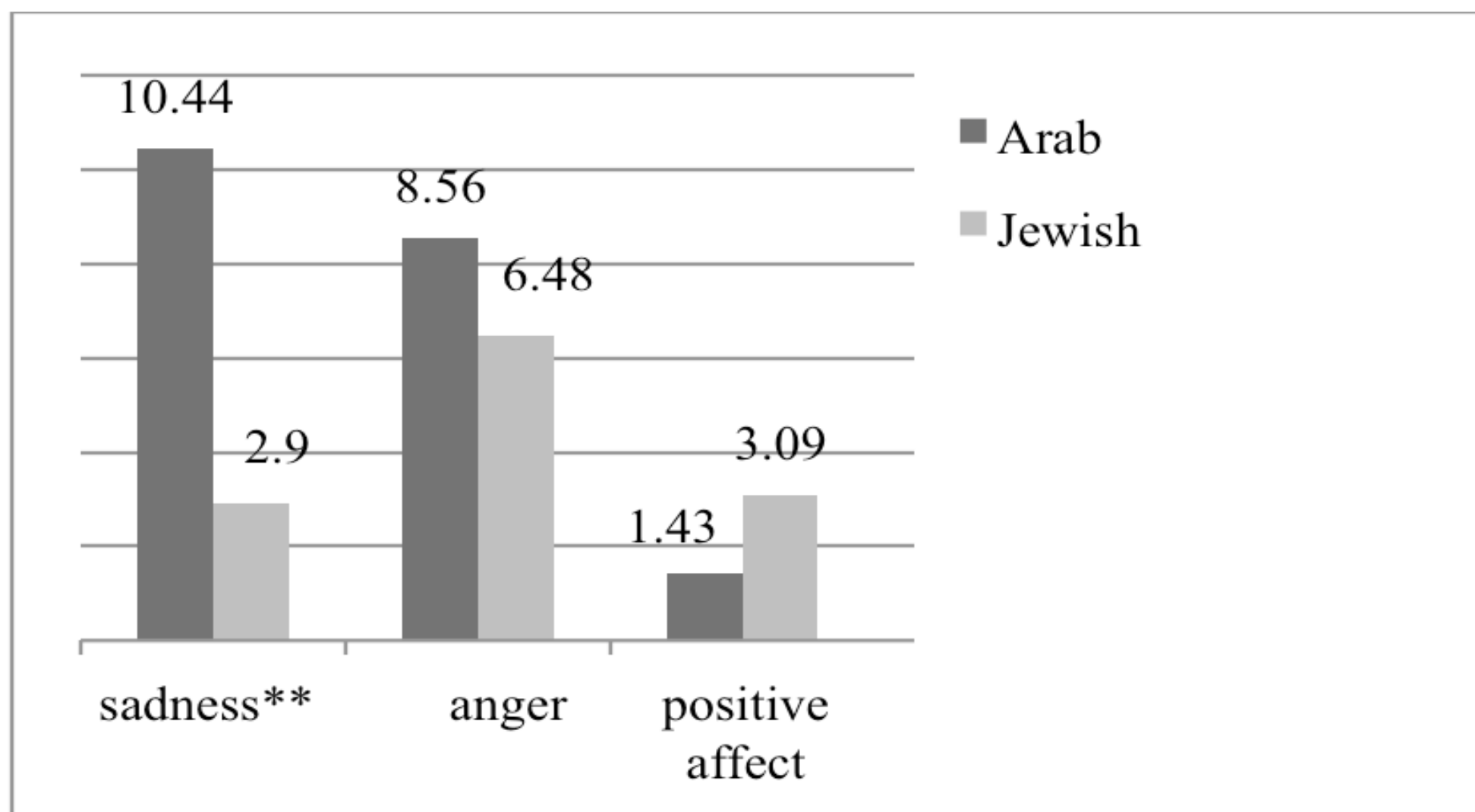


**Table 2***Socialization strategies differences in powerful negative emotion*

| <b>Socialization strategy</b>            | <b>Results</b>                              |
|--|---|
| Encouragement of emotional expression    | Jewish > Arabs ( $F=6.574, \eta^2_p=.092$ ) |
| Emotion focused reactions                |   |
| Emotional reaction to child's emotions   |   |
| Problems focused reactions               |   |
| Minimization                             |   |
| Punishing reactions                      | N.S   |
| Non-acceptance of child emotion          |   |
| Ignorance of child emotion               |   |
| Causal reaction or providing information |   |
| Giving in                                |   |
| Witnessing child's emotion               |   |

In the second hypothesis, we examined the cultural differences in emotional expression. Contrary to our hypothesis, we found that Arab children were sadder than Jewish children [ $F(1,61) = 10.99, p < 0.1$ ]. However, no differences in intensity were found (results are shown in chart 1).

Finally, regarding our third hypothesis claiming a mediation link between children's emotional expression and mothers' socialization strategies, it was found (as shown in table 3), that in situations provoking powerful negative emotion, we found a positive correlation between the child's expression of a positive emotion and the encouragement of the emotional expression by the mother ( $r = 0.264, p < 0.05$ ); while a significant negative correlation was found between the expression of sadness and the same strategy ( $r = -0.282, p < 0.05$ ). Additionally, in powerless negative emotion, we found a positive correlation between sadness and the two strategies of problems focused reactions and giving in.



**Chart 1**

Cultural differences in emotional expression

\*\*  $p < 0.01$

**Table 3**

*Links between emotional expression and socialization strategies*

| <b>Socialization strategy</b>            | <b>Sadness</b> | <b>Anger</b> | <b>Positive</b> |
|--|----------------|--------------|-----------------|
| Emotional reaction to child's emotions   | -.085          | .008         | -.093           |
| Encouragement of emotional expression    | <b>-.282*</b>  | -.163        | <b>.264*</b>    |
| Emotion focused reactions                | .109           | .060         | -.106           |
| Problems focused reactions               | -.059          | -.127        | -.032           |
| Minimization                             | -.207          | -.139        | -.008           |
| Punishing reactions                      | .027           | .002         | -.135           |
| Non-acceptance of child emotion          | <b>.300*</b>   | -.114        | -.078           |
| Ignorance of child emotion               | -.027          | -.073        | .036            |
| Causal reaction or providing information | .003           | .173         | .163            |
| Giving in                                | -.019          | .005         | .091            |
| Witnessing child's emotion               | -.173          | -.078        | <b>.741**</b>   |

Examining the mediation links between the variables, a regression analysis showed that the only significant mediating lane was sadness through the strategy non acceptance of the emotion in the situation provoking powerful negative emotion (mediation results are shown in the model below).



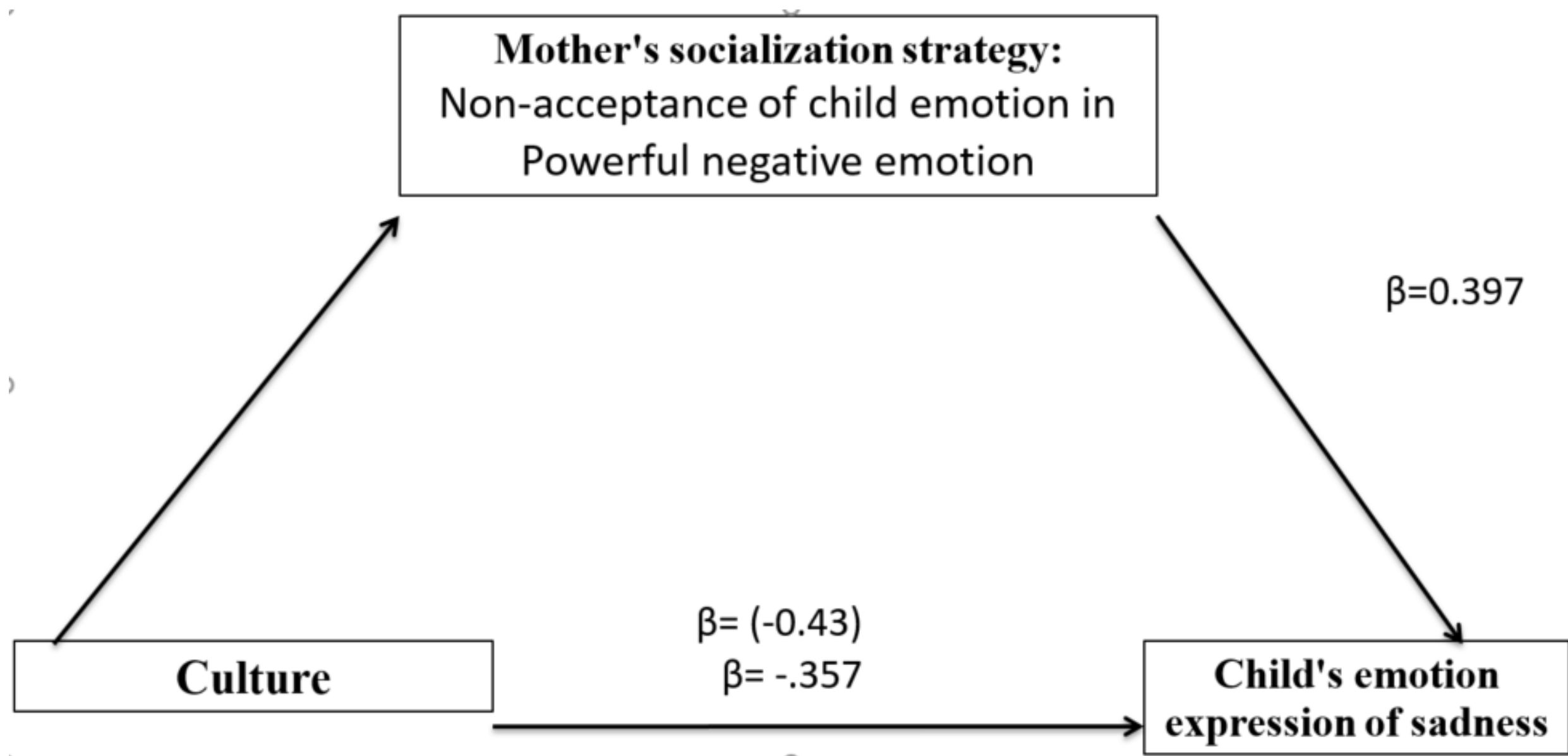


Figure 1

## Discussion

The present study was a part of an international project addressing cultural differences in emotional expression and socialization strategies. Hence, we tried to measure the differences in socialization strategies that were used by mothers. One of the hypotheses claimed that Arab mothers, as part of a collectivist culture, would encourage emotional expression less, in comparison to the individualistic Jewish mothers, who consider emotional expression as reflecting separateness, autonomy and uniqueness (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). This hypothesis was supported by the findings, which are consistent with the literature, pointing out that in individualistic cultures it is more acceptable to encourage the child's emotional expression than in collectivist cultures, especially regarding negative emotional expression (Eisenberg, Fabes, Murphy, Karbon, Smith & Maszk, 1996; Fabes, Leonard, Kupanoff, & Martin, 2001). Therefore, it may be argued that different perceptions of the same emotion may contribute to the use of different socialization strategies.

Regarding the second hypothesis claiming that Arab children would demonstrate emotional expression less than Jewish children, the findings showed no differences in most emotions. Thus, the only significant difference was found in sadness so that Arab children expressed sadness more than Jewish children. This finding can be explained based on the functional theory (Barrett & Campos, 1991), which claims that each emotion has its own unique function in the social context. Hence, the functional role of sadness changes among different cultures; in collectivist cultures its role bears no threat to group harmony because it is considered a submissive and non aggressive negative emotion, arousing sympathy and empathy (Safdar *et al.*, 2009; Dwairy, 1998). In contrast, Eid & Diener (2001) found that in individualistic cultures there is more pressure to ex-

press joy and to be happy. In other words, sad people are seen as failures.

The third hypothesis claimed a mediation link between culture and the emotional expression through socialization strategies. The findings showed only one significant lane of sadness through the strategy of non acceptance of emotion in the situation provoking powerful negative emotion. To conclude, the lack of any other mediation links, as well as the lack of differences in emotional expression and socialization strategies between Arab and Jewish mothers, can be viewed or understood as attesting the dynamic modernization process that the Arab society in Israel is undergoing (Oyserman, Coon, & Kimmelmeier, 2002), whereby the Arab society is more and more influenced by western values and similar to the Jewish society.

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