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Links Between Maternal Emotion Socialization Goals and Practices in an Urban Indian Context

Tripti Kathuria

The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda

Shagufa Kapadia

The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda

Wolfgang Friedlmeier

*Grand Valley State University*Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/iaccp_papersPart of the [Psychology Commons](#)

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Abstract

Socialization goals and practices are shifting and changing in countries like India due to modernization, particularly in urban context. Given the shift, mothers may endorse balanced socialization goals over traditional relational goals and that may influence their emotion regulation behavior with the toddlers. This paper aims to test whether mothers' emotion socialization practices toward their toddlers differ with reference to their socialization goals for both positive and negative socially disengaging and engaging emotions. Fifty mothers of toddlers ($M = 25$ months) from Vadodara, India, participated in the study. They answered the Emotion Socialization Goals Questionnaire (Chan et al., 2006) and were interviewed about their emotion regulation practices. Results indicated that the majority (58%) of Indian mothers showed clear preference for endorsing balanced goals. As expected, mothers with relational goals endorsed more non-supportive strategies like training, especially for negative socially disengaging emotions. No differences occurred for positive emotions. The findings are discussed with respect to the various emotion competence models that are present in the Indian cultural context.

Keywords: emotion regulation, socialization goals, toddlers, India

Links Between Maternal Emotion Socialization Goals and Practices in an Urban Indian Context

Cultures differ in their values on individualism or independence and collectivism or interdependence (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1995). In Western cultures, a cultural model of individualism is prevalent which emphasizes an autonomous self, guided by one's inner psychological attributes that guide the social behavior (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). In this cultural model, emotions are experienced as an internal personal characteristic, and expression of emotions is encouraged (Kitayama et al., 2006). On the other hand, in Asian context, a cultural model of collectivism is prevalent with emphasis on group cohesion and wherein an individual is embedded in social groups and relationships. In this cultural model, expression of emotions is encouraged to promote social harmony and discourage expressions of emotion that may be a risk for group relations (Kitayama et al., 2006; Raval et al., 2016).

The cultural emphasis on individualism or collectivism leads to variations in socialization goals (LeVine, 1974), which may influence the parental practices. In line with the cultural model of independence prevalent in Western context, caregivers aim to socialize the child to promote inner psychological attributes (Markus & Kitayama, 1991) and caregivers in this context strive to foster individualistic emotional competence in their children which promotes self-expression, open expression and communication of emotions (Friedlmeier et al., 2011). In contrast, aligning with the cultural model of collectivism prevalent in Asian context such as India, caregivers aim to socialize the child being a part of group; where self is embedded in relation to others (Mascolo et al., 2004) and caregivers in this context strive to foster relational emotional competence in their children which promotes norms of emotion display rules, sensitivity to the needs of group and controlling expressions of socially disengaging emotions, such as anger (Friedlmeier et al., 2011). Importantly, the dimensions of individualism or collectivism can vary within and across the cultures. Research has indicated the co-existence of both independence and interdependence within the same cultures (Suizzo, 2007; Sinha & Tripathi, 1994). Aligning with the co-existence of cultural model, there can be co-existence of caregiver's socialization goals. For example, caregivers' emphasis on teaching the child to respect elders, being sensitive to the needs of the others and at the same time encourage autonomy (Tuli & Chaudhary, 2010). Research in India indicated that urban educated mothers endorse both relational and individualistic socialization goals to a certain extent (Raval et al., 2014). The first objective of the current study was to examine how many urban Indian mothers of toddlers would endorse individualistic, relational, and balanced socialization goals.

Emotion Socialization in the Indian Context

Previous research on emotion socialization of children in India has essentially focused on negative socially disengaging emotion (anger) and negative socially engaging emotion (sadness) (Raval & Martini, 2009, 2011; Raval et al., 2014). With respect to maternal emotion socialization, strategies are broadly categorized as supportive or non-supportive

(Eisenberg et al., 1998). For example, expressive encouragement, emotion focused, and problem focused strategies are supportive strategies in which parents comfort the child either verbally or non-verbally and help them to resolve the problem. On the other hand, punishment, emotion dismissive, and minimizing are non-supportive strategies, in which parents tend to control the expression of child's negative emotion or minimize the importance of how the child is feeling (Eisenberg et al., 1998).

Traditionally, the Indian culture favors an interdependent orientation wherein self is defined in relation to others and interpersonal relationships form the basis of self. The emotion socialization practices of parents in this context focus on inculcating cultural sensitivity in emotion regulation to maintain social harmony across social contexts (Yeo, et al., 2021). For example, mothers reported emotion focused (comfort) and expressive encouragement of emotion expression towards sadness than anger and not talking to child in response to anger than sadness (Raval et al., 2016). Indian parents emphasize teaching the child to express the emotions to maintain social harmony and to regulate the emotions that can be a risk for group harmony (Raval & Martini, 2009; Yeo et al., 2021). Explanation-oriented behavior, lecturing the child, telling the child that the displayed emotion is unacceptable are training strategies with the goal to teach the child expected appropriate emotion expression (Chan, et al., 2009; Raval & Martini, 2011, Raval et al., 2016). Although such strategies are problem-focused responses and were qualified as such by Raval et al. (2014), they neither validate the emotion nor punish the child but rather aim at teaching the child the appropriate channels to regulate the emotion expression. These strategies are rather non-supportive regarding the child's emotion, but supportive in promoting the cultural goal of emotion control. Scolding and not talking to the child for a brief period are additionally reported strategies in Asian studies and not mentioned in Western studies, but qualify as dismissive and disciplinary strategies (Chan, et al., 2009; Raval & Martini, 2011, Raval et al., 2016).

As discussed above, the existing literature on emotion socialization in Indian contexts is limited, with focus on only negative emotions (anger, sadness), and older age group (school going children, adolescents). The present study expands and aims at examining emotion socialization practices of mothers of toddlers for both negative socially disengaging emotions (anger, jealousy), negative socially engaging emotions (fear, sadness, shame) and positive socially disengaging emotions (joy) and positive socially engaging emotion (empathy).

There is growing literature on socialization and parental emotion socialization practices but not much is known about the links between maternal socialization goals and maternal socialization practices, particularly in an urban Indian context. Notable research on the links between maternal goals and practices in Indian context by Raval et al. (2014) indicated that Indian mothers endorsed both relational and individualistic socialization goals to a certain extent. Their findings revealed a significant relationship between the mothers' socialization goals and their emotion regulation behavior. Mothers' relational socialization goals were positively related to mothers' emotion regulation behavior. In other words, mothers' relational socialization goals were positively related to culturally salient supportive strategy, that is explanation-oriented behavior but not solution-oriented behavior towards

their children's expression of anger and sadness. In contrast, mothers' individualistic socialization goals were unrelated to regulation strategies (Raval et al., 2014). However, this research is limited with reference to age (early adolescence), valence of emotions (negative: anger and sadness) and socialization strategies (explanation-oriented versus solution-oriented behavior). Positive emotions are rarely studied in emotion socialization research. One notable cross-cultural study (Corapci, et al., 2017) included positive emotions and identified three main strategies: caregivers downregulate, mirror, or upregulate the child's emotion.

Expanding the previous studies, the second aim of the current study was to examine the links between maternal socialization goals and practices with toddlers in an urban Indian context for negative socially disengaging emotions (anger, jealousy), negative socially engaging emotions (fear, sadness, shame) as well as positive socially disengaging emotions (joy) and positive socially engaging emotion (empathy) across supportive (e.g., problem focused, emotion focused, upregulation, mirroring) and non-supportive strategies (e.g., training, dismissive, disciplinary).

Present Study

The current study examines the links between the maternal emotion socialization goals and their practices with toddlers in an urban Indian context. Toddlerhood represents a rapid developmental phase for socio-emotional competence and an important period to teach children culturally appropriate values and standards (Perez & Gauvain, 2007). Children in Indian context grow up in the care of multiple caregivers that emphasize interdependence. However, the role of the mother remains central, particularly in early years (0-2 years) (Sharma, 2003); hence, we focused on maternal socialization goals and practices for both positive and negative emotions. We derived the following hypotheses:

1) For negative socially disengaging emotions (anger and jealousy), we expect that mothers with relational emotional goals will endorse non-supportive strategies such as training whereas mothers with balanced goals will endorse a combination of supportive and non-supportive strategies. Mothers with individualistic emotional goals are predicted to display mostly supportive strategies.

2) For negative socially engaging emotions (fear, sadness and shame), we expect differences between the three groups of mothers since the socially engaging emotions do not disrupt the harmony in the group as such.

3) For positive socially disengaging emotion (joy), we expect that mothers with relational socialization goals will endorse non-supportive strategies like downregulation. Mothers with balanced goals would endorse combination of supportive and non-supportive strategies and mothers with individualistic socialization goals would endorse supportive strategies like upregulating.

4) For positive socially engaging emotion (empathy), we expect that mothers with relational socialization goals will endorse supportive strategies like mirroring more than mothers with individualistic and balanced goals.

Method

Participants

Fifty Indian mothers ($M = 29.80$, $SD = 3.22$) of toddlers with mean age of 26.64 months ($SD = 4.34$) including 28 boys and 22 girls from an urban context of Vadodara, Gujarat, India participated in the study. All mothers were married with a mean age of 29.80 years old ($SD = 3.22$). Regarding education, 48% of mothers were college graduates, 34% had completed post-graduation education while 16% either completed secondary school or vocational education. Most mothers (58%) were stay-at-home mothers. Participants were selected using snowball purposive sampling.

Procedure

Mothers provided consent and completed a socio-demographic questionnaire and Socialization Goals Questionnaire (Chan et al., 2009). They were interviewed individually using an interview guide adapted from the Coping with Children's Negative Emotions Scale (CCNES; Fabes et al., 2002). Eleven vignettes eliciting a particular situation in which a child experiences emotions were presented to a mother in a fixed order. After presenting each vignette, mothers were asked to remember or imagine each situation and respond to the question. The mothers were requested to "remember or imagine if you were in that situation, how would you react? What would you say?" Probing was used in case of vague answers. The interview lasted about 30 minutes. Interviews were audiotaped, transcribed, and coded. The first author was trained on coding the interviews by the principal investigator of the project with the goal to get 80% reliability agreement with research assistant based in the USA. The goal was achieved after coding ten American and five Indian interviews.

Measures

Socialization Goals

Mothers' socialization goals were assessed using Socialization Goals Questionnaire (Chan et al., 2009). The questionnaire has 20 items, ten items assess individualistic emotional competence (IEC) and ten items assesses relational emotional competence (REC). Mothers were asked to indicate how important each item is for them on a 6-point Likert-type scale, from 1 (very unimportant) to 6 (very important). Examples: "How important following goals are for the mothers: my child can control his/her anger and disappointment so as not to make others unhappy (relational), my child can express negative feelings in relation to others (individualistic)." Cronbach alpha for the subscales was .54 for IEC and .58 for REC.

Emotion Socialization Interview

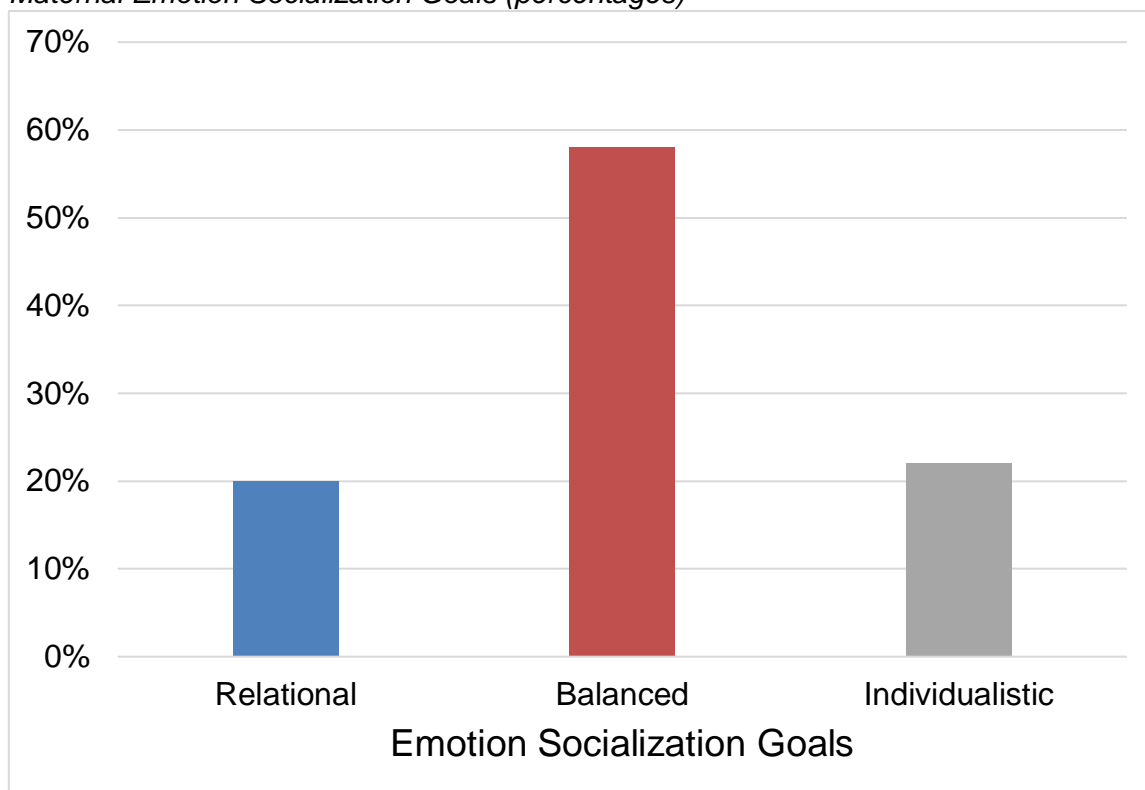
The semi-structured interview consisted of 11 vignettes in which child experiences an emotion was used. There were three vignettes for negative socially disengaging emotions (e.g., anger, jealousy), five vignettes for negative socially engaging emotion (e.g., fear,

sadness, shame). There were two vignettes for positive socially disengaging emotion (joy/happiness) and one for positive socially engaging emotion (empathy).

Coding of emotion socialization interview. For coding of the data, recurrent themes of responses to negative emotions were identified in interview transcripts, which were mapped on categories based on previous research with Western (Denham et al., 2007; Fabes et al., 2002; Gottman et al., 1997; Hoffman, 1988) and non-Western samples (Chan et al., 2009; Raval et al., 2012). A coding system generated by the project team (Friedlmeier, et al., 2013) was adapted that involved five response categories to negative socially disengaging and engaging emotions. It comprised of two supportive strategies, such as problem-focused responses, emotion focused responses and three non-supportive strategies, such as dismissive, training, and disciplinary. For the positive social disengaging and engaging emotions, four response categories were used comprising three supportive strategies, such as problem focused responses, upregulation, and mirroring as well as one non-supportive strategy, such as dismissive.

Figure 1

Maternal Emotion Socialization Goals (percentages)



Results

Maternal Socialization Goals

To determine mother's socialization goal orientation, a median split for both dimensions was computed that led to three categories: mothers with preference for relational socialization goals, for individualistic socialization goals or with preference for balanced socialization goals. Overall, 58% mothers ($n = 29$) endorsed balanced goals (the values for both dimensions were either both lower than the median or both higher than the median) while 22% mothers ($n = 11$) endorsed individualistic and 20 percent mothers endorsed relational socialization goals ($n = 10$) (see Figure 1).

Links Between Maternal Socialization Goals and Practices

Since the strategies were not the same across all the four different types of emotions, we computed 2-way ANOVAs for each of the four emotion types (negative and positive socially engaging, negative and positive socially disengaging) with socialization goals (relational, individualistic, and balanced) as between subject factor and strategy use as a repeated measure. Additionally, we controlled for socio-demographic variables such as gender of the child, education and work status of the mother. If the interaction effect between maternal socialization goals and strategies was significant, we computed one-way ANOVAs for each strategy as post-hoc tests.

Maternal Goals and Practices for Negative Socially Disengaging Emotions: Anger and Jealousy

The main effect was significant, $F(4,172) = 5.50, p < .001$. Problem-focused and training strategies were dominant compared to emotion-focused, dismissive and disciplinary strategies (see Figure 2). Beyond that main effect, the interaction between maternal goals and strategies was significant, $F(8, 172) = 1.93, p = .058$. One-way ANOVAs as post-hoc test indicated that mothers with balanced socialization goals endorsed problem-focused responses ($M = 46.96, SD = 16.34$) more than mothers with relational socialization goals ($M = 33.75, SD = 21.28$) and mothers with individualistic socialization goals ($M = 29.92, SD = 21.71$), $F(2, 45) = 3.21, p = .050$ (see Figure 2). Furthermore, mothers with relational socialization goals endorsed training strategies ($M = 45.83, SD = 23.81$) more than mothers with individualistic ($M = 37.87, SD = 21.20$) or balanced ($M = 26.42, SD = 21.56$) socialization goals, $F(2,45) = 2.37, p = .10$ (see Figure 2). No other significant differences occurred.

Maternal Goals and Practices for Negative Socially Engaging Emotions: Fear, Sadness and Shame

For the negative socially engaging emotions (fear, sadness and shame), the main effect strategy was significant, $F(4, 172) = 20.83, p < .001$. Mothers showed an overall preference for emotion-focused strategies ($M = 51.20, SD = 17.72$) and rarely used dismissive ($M = 6.67, SD = 8.93$) or disciplinary strategies ($M = 1.33, SD = 3.90$) (see Figure 3).

Figure 2

Endorsement of Mothers' Emotion Regulation Strategies Towards Toddlers' Negative Socially Disengaging Emotions (Anger, and Jealousy)

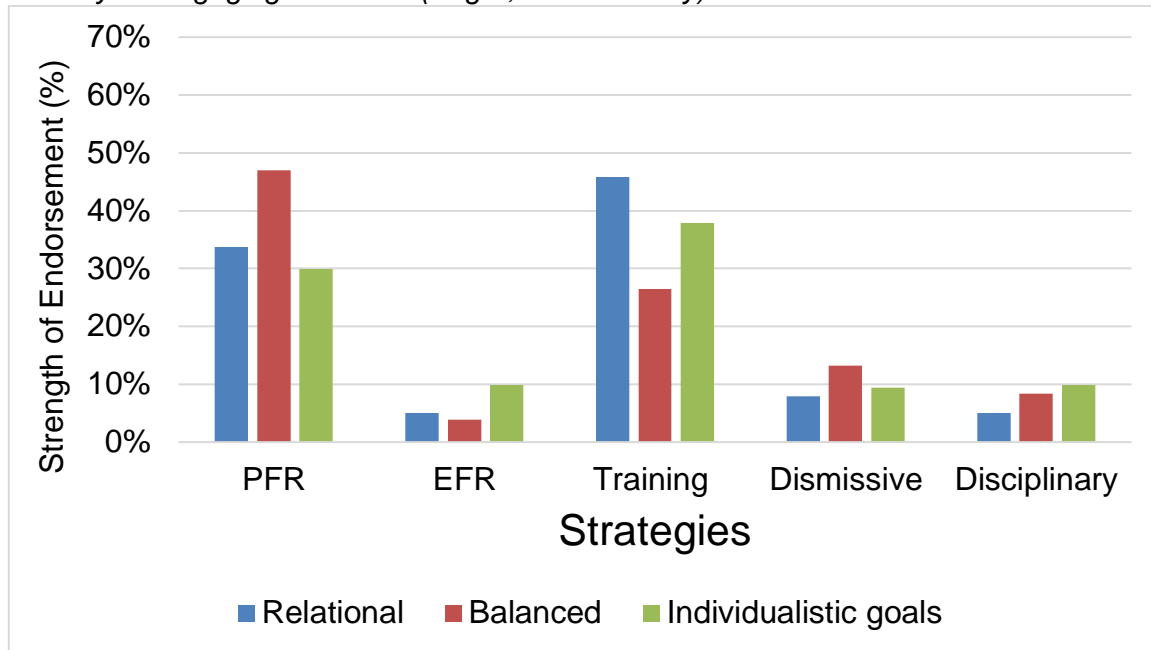
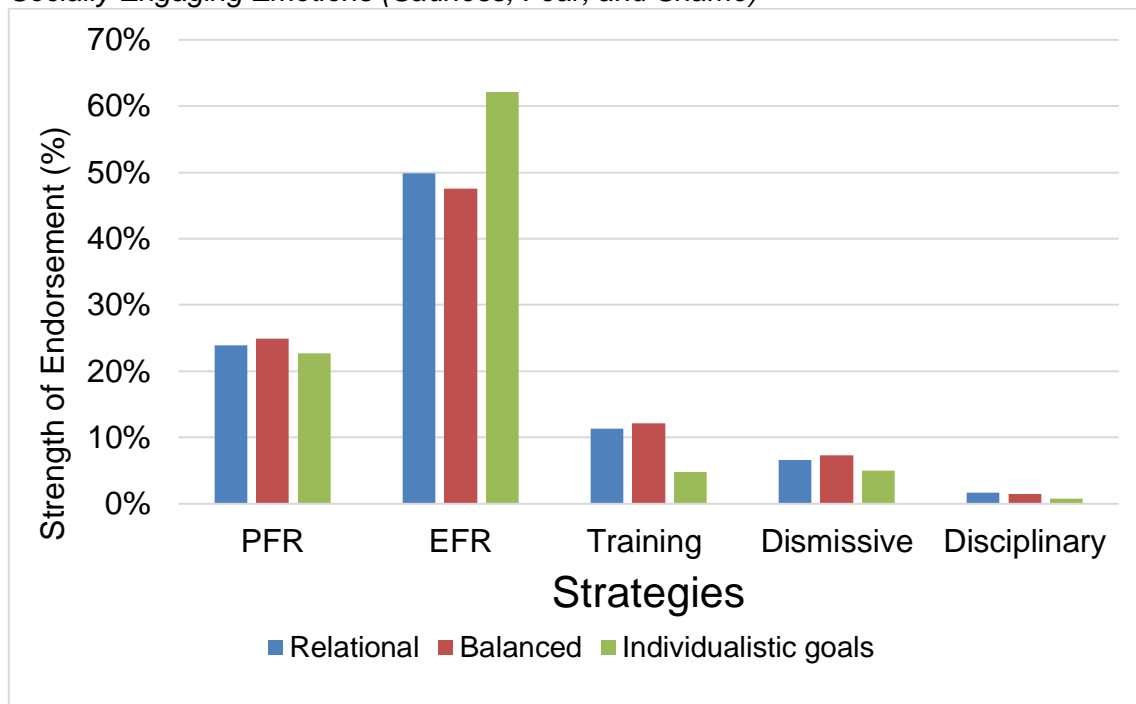


Figure 3

Endorsement of Mothers' Emotion Regulation Strategies Towards Toddlers' Negative Socially Engaging Emotions (Sadness, Fear, and Shame)



The training strategies were also rather low ($M = 10.36$, $SD = 12.39$). Additionally, the interaction between strategies and socialization goals was significant, $F(8, 172) = 2.35$, $p = .020$. One-way ANOVA post-hoc test showed that mothers with individualistic socialization goals endorsed emotion-focused responses ($M = 62.12$, $SD = 16.01$) significantly more than mothers with relational ($M = 49.86$, $SD = 17.69$) or balanced goals ($M = 47.55$, $SD = 17.21$), $F(2,45) = 4.56$, $p = .016$ (see Figure 3). Mothers with relational goals endorsed training responses more than the other two groups but the difference was not significant ($p = .12$). They did not differ across any other strategies.

Maternal Goals and Practices for Positive Socially Disengaging and Engaging Emotions: Happiness/Empathy

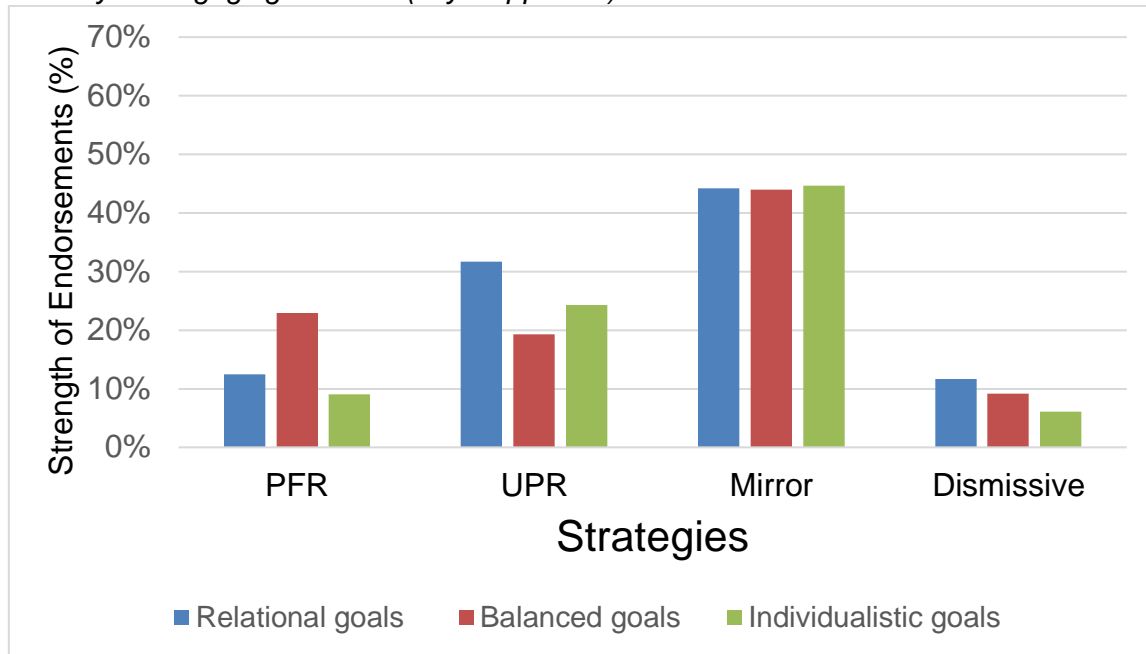
For the positive disengaging and engaging emotions of joy/happiness and empathy, there were no significant differences between maternal goals and endorsement of the strategies among three groups of mothers (see Figure 4 and 5). Mothers with relational goals seemed to endorse more mirroring and mothers with individualistic goals endorsed more upregulation (see Figure 5) but the interindividual variation within these groups of mothers was high, and these differences were not statistically significant.

Discussion

The findings of the study indicated that majority of the Indian mothers endorsed balanced socialization goals suggesting that mothers endorse both relational and individualistic goals to a certain extent. Endorsement of balanced socialization goals may reflect a cultural shift towards promoting autonomy to help children adapt to the competitive urban life, while still cultivating the embeddedness in the close-knit family relations. The findings are consistent with the previous studies (Raval et al., 2014). Further, we examined the links between maternal socialization goals (relational, individualistic, balanced) and practices across four emotion types (negative socially disengaging and engaging emotions, positive socially disengaging and engaging emotions). There are some commonalities across all mothers regarding the most likely strategy for the different types of emotions. Nevertheless, the strategies also varied by maternal socialization goals. Considering the emotion norms in a collectivistic culture that discourage open display of the social disengaging emotions, such as anger and jealousy (Kagitcibasi, 2007; Markus & Kitayama, 2010; Raval & Martini, 2009) which is prominent in the Indian context, our findings confirmed the expectation that mothers with relational goals endorsed non-supportive strategies like training for negative socially disengaging emotions of anger and jealousy more than mothers in the other two groups. Mothers' emphasis is on teaching the child why emotional expression of anger and jealousy are inappropriate with reference to social norms, sharing and empathic understanding of others since expressing negative socially disengaging emotion can harm the group harmony and relations with others. Expression of negative emotion such as anger may disrupt the

Figure 4

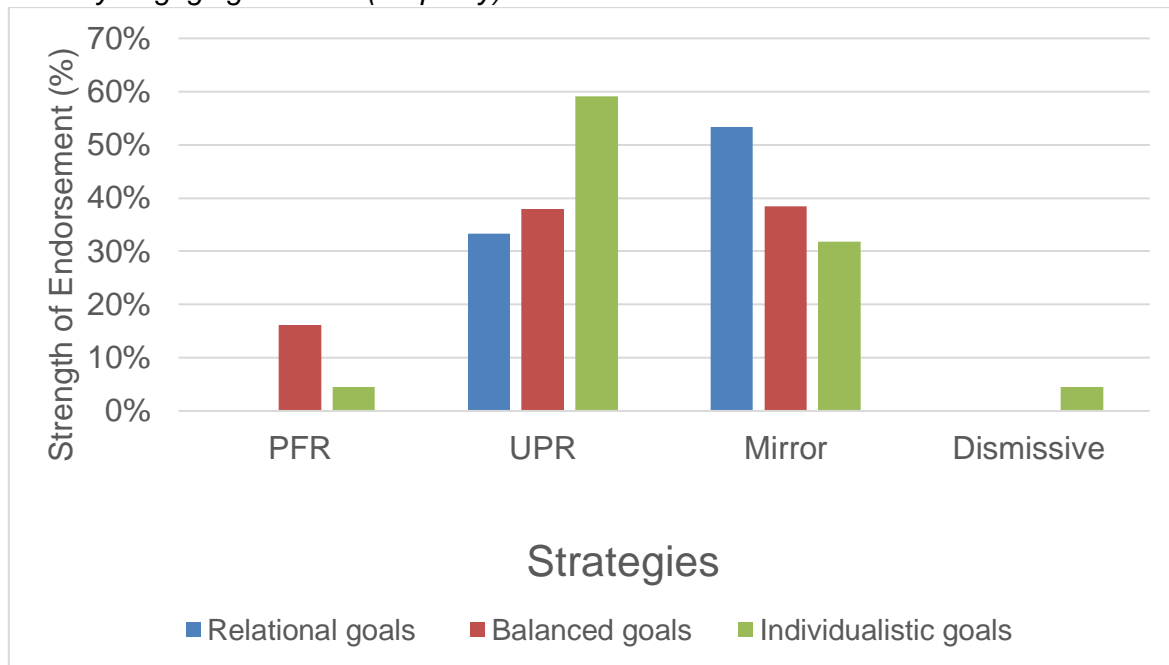
Endorsement of Mothers' Emotion Regulation Strategies Towards Toddlers' Positive Socially Disengaging Emotion (Joy/Happiness)



Notes: PFR – Problem-focused reaction; UPR – Upregulation

Figure 5

Endorsement of Mothers' Emotion Regulation Strategies Towards Toddlers' Positive Socially Engaging Emotion (Empathy)



Notes: PFR – Problem-focused reaction; UPR – Upregulation

group harmony and interpersonal relationship and training children to express the emotions to maintain social harmony is important (Raval & Martini, 2009). Also, mothers with balanced socialization goals endorsed more supportive strategies than non-supportive strategies for the negative socially disengaging emotions of anger and jealousy.

In contrast to our hypothesis (2), mothers with individualistic socialization goals endorsed supportive strategies (emotion focused responses) for negative socially engaging emotions of fear, sadness and shame more than mothers in the other two groups. Mothers with individualistic goals strive to foster individualistic emotional competence in their children to promote self-expression, open expression and communication of emotions (Friedlmeier et al., 2011). No significant link between the maternal socialization goals and strategies were noted for the positive socially disengaging (joy) and engaging emotions (empathy). It is possible that these emotions do not evoke so much variation, and they are not as relevant compared to negative emotions for this young age group. It is possible that variations may show up for older children when the societal expectations change.

In the current study we refer to supportive/non-supportive strategies in reference to dealing with the emotions of a child. That is either supportive that is validating the expression and regulation of emotions or non-supportive that is invalidating or non-acceptance of the expression and regulation of emotions. It would be interesting to move beyond the dichotomy of these two categories; and come up with better distinctions and create different concepts. Trevethan et al. (2021) argue in a cross-cultural study on maternal emotion socialization profiles in India and China, that the labels supportive may not always be adaptive and those categorized as non-supportive may not always be maladaptive in terms of child's emotion development particularly in the culture that favors collectivism. We agree that the western-based studies differentiate between supportive as positive and non-supportive as negative based on the view that free expression is ideal, and any form of suppression is bad. All negative strategies are forms of punishment and devaluations of the child's emotion. In contrast, studies in cultures striving for harmony, non-supportive strategies are also endorsed that are not punishing the child but inform the child about the inappropriateness of the emotion expression (e.g., lecturing the child, explaining why not to express, unacceptability of emotion expression). These forms are non-supportive in the sense mentioned above, but they are supportive to promote an emotion model that is based on the relational perspective. Future studies need to make a better distinction between these different forms of supportive and non-supportive, and this study here makes clear that the non-punishing non-supportive strategies are an important contribution of cross-cultural psychology as these concepts expand the Western approaches.

Limitations

There are several limitations of the current study that need to be mentioned. The sample size in the study was small and included only urban mothers of toddlers in the study. The findings of the study were not to be generalized importantly because the Indian contexts represent the heterogeneity with strong urban-rural divide, hierarchy and gender factors. Also, the number of discrete emotions in the study was limited. Though the study did expand

the previous studies by including both negative and positive socially disengaging and engaging emotions. Discrete emotions such as disgust, guilt, and surprise were left out. Also, qualifying joy as positive socially disengaging emotion is ambivalent; and needs further research to examine how joy is interpreted in Indian context. More important, the context of emotions may have influence on the endorsement of behavioral responses. A mother's response towards a particular emotion may be influenced by the situation than an emotion itself. It would be meaningful for the future research to incorporate different contexts of a particular emotion. Further, we did not look for implication of practices on child behavior that would be important aspect to consider in future research.

Conclusions

Despite the above limitations, the present study makes significant empirical contribution to understanding the links between maternal emotion socialization goals and behavior during toddlerhood in an urban Indian context. The findings of the study indicated maternal endorsement of balanced socialization goals that may reflect a cultural shift towards promoting autonomy to help children adapt to the competitive urban life, while still cultivating the embeddedness in the close-knit family relations. By and large, India is still a group-oriented society wherein the expressions of negative socially disengaging emotions of anger and jealousy are not encouraged since this may disrupt the interpersonal relationships; hence, the mothers with relational goals endorsed more training responses for the emotions of anger and jealousy. At the same time, there is a shift towards Western perspective especially in urban areas and this study supports such shift by demonstrating that more Western-oriented Indian mothers did not promote the traditional model of emotion regulation for their toddlers.

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