The Relations of Parental Affect and Encouragement to Children’s Moral Emotions and Behaviour

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ABSTRACT Although researchers have been concerned with the effects of parental socialisation on children’s outcomes, there has been surprisingly little work on the socialisation of children’s moral emotions and behaviour. The purpose of this study was to explore the role of observed parental affect and encouragement in children’s empathy-related responding and moral behaviour (i.e. cheating). Moreover, the moderating influence of children’s characteristics (i.e. sex) on this relationship was investigated. Ninety-seven girls and 119 boys (mean age = 73 months) with a parent participated in the study. Children completed a dispositional sympathy and empathy questionnaire and were observed in a resistance-to-temptation task. Further, parents’ affect and encouragement were assessed during two parent–child interactive situations. Results indicated that parents’ positive affect and encouragement were positively related to children’s sympathy. In contrast, parents’ interactive style was not related to children’s empathy. In terms of children’s moral behaviour, findings revealed that parental interactive style was related to boys’ but not girls’ cheating on a puzzle task. These findings offer support for the notion that parental practices involving emotion contribute to children’s moral development.

Children’s moral functioning has been recognised as an important outcome of the socialisation process. Current thinking about children’s morality encompasses several different phenomena, including the development of moral emotions (e.g. sympathy, empathy and guilt) and children’s moral behaviour (e.g. resisting temptations, cheating). Children’s moral emotions, particularly children’s empathic responses to another’s distress, are thought to be important precursors to prosocial behaviours and higher social competence (Hoffman, 1983; Eisenberg & Fabes, 1992). Furthermore, individual differences in children’s moral behaviours are thought to reflect differences in children’s moral internalisation and the development of conscience (Kochanska, 1991). Therefore, there is a need to understand the ways that parents can influence children’s morality. The focus of this paper is on the
socialisation of moral emotions and moral behaviour in preschoolers and young elementary school children.

Surprisingly, there has been relatively little research on the socialisation of children's moral emotions, although there is evidence that some kinds of vicariously induced moral emotions, such as empathy, are related to children's prosocial and aggressive behaviour (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998). Researchers have recently distinguished between the emotional responses of empathy, sympathy and personal distress. Empathy has been defined as an emotional response that is identical to or very similar to what the other person is feeling (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1990). Sympathy, on the other hand, is an other-orientated emotion that involves an understanding of another's distress as well as feelings of concern or sorrow for the distressed individual. Finally, personal distress is a self-focused, aversive emotional reaction (i.e. distress, anxiety) in response to another's distress and negative emotion (Batson, 1991; Eisenberg et al., 1996d). It is hypothesised that both sympathy and personal distress can stem from empathy, with the latter reflecting empathic over-arousal (Hoffman, 1983; Eisenberg et al., 1996d). Children's sympathy has been associated positively with prosocial behaviours such as helping and sharing, whereas children's personal distress reactions have been unrelated or negatively correlated with prosocial behaviours (Batson, 1991; Eisenberg & Fabes, 1991, 1998).

Several socialisation processes have been hypothesised to contribute to children's empathy-related responding (i.e. empathy, prosocial behaviour), including the quality of parent-child interaction, modelling and reinforcement. For example, attachment theorists have argued that infants who develop a secure, trusting relationship with their care-giver form more positive relationships with others and are more responsive to others' needs. In other words, based on the parent-child relationship history, children will carry forward expectations and feelings about early relationships to new relationships with other individuals (Sroufe & Fleeson, 1986). Consistent with this view, securely attached infants have been found to be more empathic and prosocial as children than have infants who were classified as insecurely attached to their mothers (Waters et al., 1986; Kestenbaum et al., 1989; Iannotti et al., 1992).

Parental warmth and support also have been found to be linked with empathy-related responding, although findings have been somewhat mixed. For instance, several researchers have found that mothers who are warm and supportive have children who display higher levels of sympathetic or prosocial responding than their peers (Zahn-Waxler et al., 1979; Janssens & Gerris, 1992; Robinson et al., 1994). Perhaps care-givers who are warm and accepting, particularly in response to their children's negative emotions, promote a positive orientation toward others and facilitate children's emotional understanding. Other investigators, however, have not found significant associations between parental warmth or support and children's empathy-related responses and prosocial behaviour (Koesneter et al., 1990; Iannotti et al., 1992). Unfortunately, most investigators have not differentiated between children's sympathy and empathy reactions; thus, the mixed pattern of findings may vary due to the failure to make this critical distinction. Perhaps parental warmth and support are related to children's sympathy but not to their empathy.
Parental punitive responses may be related to non-optimal emotion-related responses in children. For instance, when parents punish or restrict children’s expressions of emotion, children may respond with lower levels of empathy or sympathy. If a parent responds to a child’s negative emotions with anger or disgust, the child may learn to deny or suppress his or her emotions and may avoid dealing with others in distress (Tomkins, 1963). In one investigation, restrictiveness in regard to children’s negative emotions was linked with higher levels of personal distress reactions in children (Eisenberg et al., 1991).

Children can also learn moral affect through teaching or modeling of moral behaviour. In several studies, parents’ reports of their own sympathy and perspective-taking were positively related to same-sex children’s empathy-related responding (Zahn-Waxler et al., 1979; Eisenberg et al., 1991). Presumably, children learn empathic or prosocial responding from observing parents’ other-orientation and the way their parents deal with emotions. Of course, parents who are more sympathetic may also be warmer and more supportive and may influence their children’s empathy-related responses through the quality of the parent–child relationship.

Thus, there may be several processes underlying how parental practices influence children’s empathic responding. Based on prior research and theory, one would expect that parental supportive practices (such as expressing positive affect and responding to children’s emotions in non-punitive ways) are important for the socialisation of children’s empathy-related moral emotions. Unfortunately, few studies have investigated this link and most work in this area has not differentiated between children’s empathy and sympathy reactions.

In addition to the socialisation of moral emotions, researchers have been interested in how children learn moral behaviour, such as honesty and resistance to temptations. As with work on children’s empathy-related responses, few investigators have examined the impact of parents’ socialisation practices on children’s moral behaviour. Individual differences in children’s moral behaviour may be accounted for by differences among children in the ability to regulate emotions or emotionally driven behaviour. That is, moral behaviours that involve controlling impulses in frustrating or tempting situations (i.e. delaying gratification, resisting temptation to cheat) may reflect individual differences related to children’s ability to regulate emotions. In fact, in one recent study, low levels of emotion regulation in infancy were related to higher levels of non-compliance (a behaviour that reflects a lack of behavioural control or resistance to temptation) at 2.5 years of age (Stifter et al., 1999).

Parental warmth and responsive care-giving are believed to affect children’s emotion-regulation abilities, which in turn may contribute to children’s ability to enact moral behaviours. With regard to the link between socialisation and children’s regulation, children whose mothers are more responsive to their distress by displaying supportive reactions toward their negative emotions such as comforting or teaching constructive coping strategies are thought to be better able than other children to regulate their emotions in both the immediate and long term (Kopp, 1989; Calkins, 1994; Cassidy, 1994; Bridges & Grodnick, 1995). Not only does appropriate intervention by a parent serve to reduce the child’s immediate levels of
distress, but it may also serve as an opportunity for children to learn strategies to regulate their negative emotions in other situations. Children learn best in disciplinary contexts in which they are not emotionally over-aroused (Hoffman, 1983). Parental behaviours that involve low levels of support or that are punitive may foster emotional over-arousal and non-constructive coping in their children. Consistent with this view, Eisenberg et al. (1996c) found that mothers’ reports of their minimising or punitive reactions to their children’s negative emotions were positively related to children’s use of avoidant coping (behavioural escape or avoiding thinking of a situation by attending to distracting stimuli or activities) and negatively related to children’s constructive coping (positive cognitive restructuring, seeking support), popularity and social skills.

There is also reason to believe that regulation plays a role in moral emotion and behaviour. Children who learn to deal with negative emotions may be better able to control their behaviour in tempting situations (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1992) and may avoid being over-aroused when faced with others’ distress. For instance, Eisenberg et al. (1996a) found a link between children’s ability to persist, rather than cheat, on a frustrating task and parents’ and teachers’ reports of children’s regulation. Moreover, researchers have found that well-regulated children are less likely to focus on their own distress and more likely to respond to others’ distress with sympathy and to exhibit prosocial behaviour than are other children (Eisenberg et al., 1996b; Eisenberg et al., 1996d). Thus, components of parental socialisation that enhance children’s regulation would also be expected to foster the development of children’s sympathetic responses.

One limitation in much of the existing work on the socialisation of moral emotions and behaviour is that investigators have often relied solely on maternal reports of parenting practices or children’s moral behaviours. The relation between observed maternal behaviour and children’s empathy and sympathy has rarely been studied. Thus, the primary goal of this work was to examine the relations of observed parental behaviours, including parents’ expression of positive and negative emotions with the child and encouragement, to children’s moral functioning. In this study, parents’ behaviours with their children were observed during two situations: one that was novel (and potentially anxiety-provoking) and another that was frustrating. On the basis of existing literature, we predicted that parental affect and behaviours that were supportive (i.e. positive affect, encouragement) would be associated with higher levels of children’s dispositional sympathy and empathy. Furthermore, because there is evidence that supportive practices are related to higher levels of children’s regulation, it was expected that parents’ positive affect and encouragement would be linked with children’s ability to resist temptation, whereas parental negative affect would be related to children’s cheating. Of course, it is also possible that children low in sympathy and empathy and who are prone to cheating elicit relatively negative behaviour from parents.

A secondary goal of this investigation was to determine the extent to which the association between parental socialisation practices and children’s moral functioning differs with the sex of the child. In previous research, some investigators have found significant gender differences in children’s empathy-related responding (Lennon &
Eisenberg, 1987), with girls reporting higher levels of empathic responses than boys, even at an early age (Zahn-Waxler et al., 1992). Sex-role norms may motivate parents to behave differently toward their sons and daughters, and this may be especially true of parenting practices that involve emotion. There is a good deal of work to support the notion that girls are socialised to be more responsive to the feelings and needs of others. Dunn et al. (1987), for example, found that mothers made more references to feeling states to daughters than to sons. Furthermore, parents may express emotion differently with their sons and daughters. Indeed, Kochanska (1997) found that mother–daughter dyads shared more positive affect than did mother–son dyads, which may result in mothers and daughters developing a more reciprocal relationship. Hence, girls may be more likely to internalise maternal values and goals than boys (Kochanska, 1997).

In addition to the notion that parents socialise children’s moral affect and behaviours differently for girls and boys, it is also possible that the parental socialisation strategies do not function in the same way for girls and boys. For example, it appears that children may be more likely to identify with or model their same-sex parent’s sympathy (Fabes et al., 1990; Eisenberg et al., 1991). Findings from Fabes et al. (1990) revealed that mothers who were more sympathetic and were better perspective-takers had girls who reported feeling more sympathetic, whereas this relation did not hold for sons. These results suggest that girls may benefit from mothers’ socialisation efforts more than boys (Fabes et al., 1990).

A final reason to study the role of children’s gender in the socialisation of morality is that children may be geared toward different aspects of socialisation, such that girls may be more attuned to socialisation of moral emotions whereas boys may be more susceptible to the socialisation of moral behaviour. In other words, boys who are committed to the male stereotype may be less interested in socialisation attempts that highlight others’ emotions and more interested in information regarding behaviour. In contrast, information pertaining to emotional responding of others (as opposed to the regulation of behaviour) may be particularly salient for girls. Therefore, we predicted that parental socialisation may be related to girls’ moral affect and boys’ moral behaviour.

Method

Participants

Participants were 216 children (97 girls, 119 boys; M age = 73.26 months, SD = 9.82, range 49–97 months) and a parent (204 mothers, 12 fathers). Families were enlisted to participate through newspaper advertisements and advertisements posted at local preschools and elementary schools. We selected older preschoolers and young elementary school children because it was expected that parents would play a primary role in the socialisation of young children’s moral emotions and behaviour. Moreover, it was expected that children of this age would be able to report accurately on their feelings of empathy and sympathy. The majority of the parents who participated in the study indicated that they were the child’s primary
care-giving parent (with the exception of seven fathers who came to the laboratory). Twenty-four per cent of mothers did not work outside the home, 4% of mothers indicated that they were students and “stay-at-home mothers” and 72% of mothers reported working outside the home. Approximately 76% of the children were non-Hispanic Caucasian, 12% were Hispanic (not black-Hispanic), 5% were Native American, 3% were black, less than 1% were Asian and 3% were of mixed origin. Mothers’ education ranged from 7 to 20 years (12 years indicated being a high school graduate, 16 years indicated being a college graduate; M = 14.11). Fathers’ education ranged from 8 to 20 years (M = 14.04). Median family income was $35,000 (range $6,000–$160,000).

Procedures

Each child and a parent came to the university where they were escorted to an experimental room and seated next to each other. An experimenter (who was always the same sex as the child) told the child and parent that they would be playing some games, recording the child’s heart rate, and watching some films. The physiological hook-up was explained briefly and the parent and child were left alone in the experimental room for 2 minutes. When the experimenter returned, he or she placed the physiological equipment (three electrodes) on the child.

The parent then was taken into another room, and the child completed the empathy/sympathy scales. Following these assessments, the child’s moral behaviour (cheating) was assessed with a puzzle-box task. For this task, children were left alone to complete a puzzle without looking. Then, the parent was invited back into the experimental room to assist the child in a second puzzle task. This task provided an opportunity to observe the parent interacting with the child when the child was engaged in a frustrating task. At the end of the session, children were given a small prize.

Measures

Children’s sympathy, empathy, and cheating. At the beginning of the laboratory visit, the parent was taken into a side room where he or she completed some questionnaires. The child remained in the experimental room and, after participating in some other procedures, was administered the empathy/sympathy questionnaire verbally. This questionnaire was a 14-item measure including items adapted from Bryant’s (1982) empathy scale and an expanded version of Eisenberg et al.’s (1991) sympathy scale. Children rated each item on a three-point response scale (1 = not like you, 2 = sort of like you, or 3 = really like you). Eight items reflected empathy (e.g. “I get upset when I see an animal being hurt”, “I feel sad for other children who are upset”) and six items represented sympathy (e.g. “I feel sorry for people who don’t have the things that I have”, “When I see someone being picked on, I feel kind of sorry for them”). The alphas were 0.76 and 0.63 for the empathy and sympathy scales, respectively.

Children’s ability to resist temptation was assessed during the first puzzle task.
For this task, children were shown a $24 \times 12 \times 14$-inch box that contained puzzle pieces of geometric shapes (e.g. square, circle, star, oval). The box was built with a clear Plexiglas back (so children's hand movements could be observed) and with a cloth covering the front (which had sleeves that children slipped their arms through). The cloth in front could be lifted up so that a child could cheat by looking at the puzzle. Children were instructed to try to assemble the puzzle without looking at it and were told that if they finished the puzzle within 5 minutes they would receive an attractive prize at the end of the session. The amount of time the child spent cheating on the puzzle task (i.e. lifted up the cloth to look at the puzzle) was observed. Inter-rater reliability (Pearson correlations) was calculated on 52% of the data and was 0.99. Time cheating was divided by the time spent alone with the puzzle.

*Parental emotion and encouragement.* During the laboratory visit, parents’ behaviours in two parent–child interactions were also observed. First, the parent was observed interacting with his or her child during a novel situation that involved placing electrodes on the child’s body. After a brief explanation of the physiological recording, the experimenter appeared to have misplaced some tissues used to clean the child’s skin and told the child that he or she forgot something and would need to leave the room for a few minutes. The parent and child were left alone to interact in the experimental room for 2 minutes. When the experimenter returned, he or she placed two heart rate electrodes on the child’s chest and one electrode on the child’s back. The parent and child were videotaped by means of a hidden camera both when the parent and child were alone and during the electrode hook-up.

In addition, parenting behaviours were observed during a mildly frustrating situation. For this task, the parent and child were shown the puzzle box (the same as the child alone) containing puzzle pieces of alphabet shapes. The children were told to work on the puzzle without looking and that they would receive a prize at the end of the session if they completed the puzzle in the allotted 5 minutes. Parents could see the puzzle and were told that they could help their child verbally in any way that they thought was necessary. Again, the parent and child were videotaped.

*Data Coding*

Parents’ interactive behaviours were coded from the videotapes of both the novel and frustrating situations. During the novel situation when the parent and child were alone prior to putting on the physiological electrodes, parents’ positive affect (e.g. smiling, laughing, positive comments) and negative affect (e.g. negative comments, irritation, frowning) were coded on a five-point scale ($1 = \text{none}; 5 = \text{very frequent or intense}$) every 30 seconds and averaged across the 2-minute period when the parent and child were alone. For the period during which the experimenter hooked up the physiological equipment, single ratings for both positive affect and negative affect were coded with the one to five scale. Composite scores for positive and negative affect were created by averaging the scores for the 2-minute parent–child interaction
period with the score for the hook-up period. Inter-rater reliabilities (Pearson correlations) were calculated on 23% of these data and were 0.82 and 0.74 for positive and negative affect, respectively.

In addition, parents’ affect and emotion-related practices during the frustrating puzzle task were coded. As with the novel situation, parents’ positive affect and negative affect were coded on a five-point scale every 30 seconds and each was averaged across the 5-minute task. Inter-rater reliabilities (Pearson correlations) were calculated on 25% of the affect data and were 0.83 and 0.85 for parents’ positive and negative affect, respectively. In addition, the degree to which the parent encouraged the child was scored with a single rating on a scale from 1 (very low) to 5 (very high). Encouragement reflected the parent making positive remarks in response to the child’s behaviour and could include positive tone. For example, statements such as: “that was great!” “that’s it, keep trying” or “you can do it!” would be included in this scale. Inter-rater reliability (Pearson correlation) was calculated on 25% of these data and was 0.75.

Scores for both parents’ positive affect and parents’ negative affect were significantly related across the two tasks, $R_s(213) = 0.32$ and $0.15$, $P_s < 0.001$ and 0.03 for positive affect and negative affect, respectively. Because aggregation enhances the reliability of a measure (Rushton et al., 1983), the two measures of positive emotion were averaged to form a total positive emotionality score and the two measures of negative affect were averaged to compute a composite measure of negative emotionality.

Results

Descriptive Analyses

The means for parents’ and children’s behaviours can be found in Table I. Children generally reported moderate levels of empathy and sympathy. There was a wide range of individual differences in the proportion of time children spent cheating on the puzzle task (range 0–1.0).
Because previous research has demonstrated gender differences in children’s moral functioning, we first examined whether there were differences in children’s moral affect and behaviour as a function of children’s sex. Girls reported being significantly more sympathetic and empathic than did boys, $r_s(214) = 1.98$ and $3.35$, $P < 0.05$ and 0.001. Further, boys spent a significantly higher proportion of time cheating on the puzzle task than did girls, $t(213) = 3.01$, $P < 0.003$. Parents, however, did not interact differently with boys versus girls.

Next, intercorrelations among the child and parent variables were computed. There was a substantial positive correlation between children’s sympathy and empathy, $r(216) = 0.67$, $P < 0.001$. In addition, the proportion of time children spent cheating on the puzzle task was significantly negatively correlated with empathy and sympathy, both $r_s(213) = -0.15$, $P < 0.02$. Therefore, moral behaviour was associated with emotion-related responding. In addition, parents who displayed more positive affect scored higher on encouragement and displayed less negative emotionality, $r_s(213) = 0.55$ and $-0.25$, $P < 0.001$. Conversely, parents who displayed more negative affect with their children scored lower on encouragement, $r(213) = -0.31$, $P < 0.001$.

**Relation between Parents’ Affect and Encouragement to Children’s Moral Functioning**

To examine whether parents’ affect and encouragement were associated with children’s empathy-related responses and moral behaviour, Pearson correlations were computed. As predicted, parents’ emotionality differentially related to both boys’ and girls’ dispositional sympathy (see Table II). Parents’ positive emotionality was related to higher sympathy in daughters, and parents’ negative emotionality was linked with lower sympathy in sons. Parental encouragement was associated with both boys’ and girls’ increased sympathy. In contrast to these findings, parental affect and encouragement were not related to children’s dispositional empathy (see Table II)[1].

Not only did we expect parents’ interactive behaviour to be related to children’s empathy-related responses, but we also anticipated that parents’ behaviour would be associated with children’s moral behaviour (i.e. cheating on the puzzle task when alone). Parents’ positive and negative affect and encouragement scores were related to boys’, but not girls’, cheating on the puzzle task. Parents who were more positive and encouraging had sons who spent less time cheating on the puzzle, whereas parents who were more negative had sons who spent more time cheating[2].

Because a small number of fathers were included in analyses ($n = 12$) and because fathers may have different socialising influences on their sons and daughters, additional correlations between parental interactive style and children’s moral affect and behaviour were computed excluding fathers. Results were consistent with the previous analyses and can be examined in Table II (see $r_s$ in parentheses).

**Discussion**

We reasoned that parents who displayed more positive affect and encouragement would serve as models for empathy-related responses in their children. Children may
| Parents' behaviours | Sympathy | | | Children's moral emotions and behaviour | | | Cheating | | |
| | Total | Boys | Girls | | Total | Boys | Girls | Total | Boys | Girls |
| Positive affect | 0.16** | 0.11 | 0.25** | 0.05 | -0.01 | 0.16 | -0.11 | -0.24** | 0.07 |
| (0.15*) | (0.11) | (0.23*) | (0.05) | (0.02) | (0.12) | (0.15*) | (0.26**) | (0.00) |
| Negative affect | -0.18** | -0.20* | -0.15 | -0.10 | -0.14 | -0.01 | 0.16** | 0.22** | 0.05 |
| (-0.18**) | (-0.20*) | (-0.16) | (-0.10) | (-0.14) | (-0.03) | (0.16*) | (0.23**) | (0.03) |
| Encouragement | 0.20** | 0.20* | 0.22* | 0.08 | 0.11 | 0.08 | -0.16** | -0.28** | -0.03 |
| (0.19**) | (0.18*) | (0.23*) | (0.08) | (0.11) | (0.08) | (-0.17**) | (-0.25**) | (-0.08) |

Parentheses indicate the correlation coefficient when fathers were excluded from analyses.

†P < 0.10; *P < 0.05; **P < 0.01.
take cues from their parents regarding how to respond to another's emotions; thus, parents who exhibit a warm and supportive interactive style may have children who learn to relate to others in a similar manner. On the other hand, when parents respond negatively to, or communicate disapproval of, children's negative emotions, children may be less likely to learn to understand others' emotions or may be prone to personal distress reactions. Moreover, they may resent their parent, be resistant to attending to the parent and less likely to internalise parental values and lessons.

Consistent with our predictions, parental emotion in potentially stressful contexts with children was significantly related to children's sympathy and moral behaviour. Parents who were supportive and responded warmly to their children in stressful or novel contexts had children who focused on others' needs and emotions. These results are consistent with findings of several researchers who have shown that parents who are more sympathetic (and also likely to be warm and supportive) have more sympathetic children. This association appears to be especially true for mothers and daughters (Fabes et al., 1990; Eisenberg et al., 1991, 1992b; Eisenberg & McNally, 1993).

The way parents respond in stressful contexts probably influences how children understand and react to their own and others' emotions. Parents who are supportive and accepting in response to children's negative emotions in situations that do not hurt other people may provide an optimal amount of emotional support so that children are able to deal with their own distress in other contexts and can respond with concern to others' emotional needs. On the other hand, parents' negative affect was negatively correlated with children's sympathy. When parents sanction or respond negatively to their children's emotion, children may respond with anxiety in response to others' distress because of the association between the expression of negative emotions and sanctions (Buck, 1984; Eisenberg et al., 1991). Thus, these children may be prone to personal distress reactions rather than sympathy when faced with others' distress. Furthermore, because children whose parents respond negatively to their expression of emotion tend to be relatively low in social skills (Eisenberg et al., 1992a, 1996d) and are relatively unlikely to use constructive coping strategies (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1994), they may be less able than their peers to respond in an other-oriented manner. In addition, parental negative emotion may have been indicative of the general quality of the parent–child relationship. When parents are low in warmth toward their children an insecure attachment relationship may develop, and children's other-orientation may not be fostered.

It is notable that parents' emotions and encouragement were related to children's sympathy but not to children's empathy. This finding offers support for differentiating sympathy and empathy responses in children. Although children's sympathy and empathy were substantially correlated, it is possible that some of the dispositional empathy items actually reflected children's disposition to experience personal distress (e.g. "I get upset when I see an animal being hurt"), whereas the sympathy items reflected children's feelings of concern for others (e.g. "I feel sorry for other people who don't have the things I have"). In contrast to personal distress, sympathy has been positively related to children's helping behaviour and social competence (Eisenberg et al., 1996d).
The findings from this work contribute to the literature on sex differences in children's moral emotions and behaviour. As a whole, boys tended to spend more time cheating on the puzzle task than did girls, suggesting that boys may be less regulated than are girls. Boys', but not girls', cheating was correlated with parents' affect and encouragement. Therefore, in relation to cheating, boys may have been more susceptible than girls to the effects of parents' affect and behaviour. It is also possible that the boys were more competitive than girls and may have felt particularly pressured to win a prize and succeed on the task when parents typically respond with negative affect or disapproval. On the other hand, when parents are positive and supportive, boys may feel less pressure to succeed on tasks (and, thus, cheat less). More research on the link between parents' socialisation strategies and children's behavioural regulation is needed.

Although findings from this investigation indicate that parental affect and encouragement may play an important role in children's moral emotions and behaviour, caution in the interpretation of these results should be exercised for several reasons. First, due to the correlational nature of this study, the direction of effects is unclear. Rather than parents influencing their children's moral emotions and behaviour, children may elicit particular types of behaviours from their parents. Longitudinal data on this topic are needed to examine whether children's empathy-related responses and moral behaviour (i.e., cheating, resisting temptation) can be predicted from early parental behaviour.

Another limitation of this work is that children and parents were from predominantly Caucasian backgrounds. Parents' socialisation practices are embedded in their cultural values (Super & Harkness, 1986); thus, the appropriateness of certain values (i.e., winning prize, caring for others' distress) and goals for children may vary between cultures. Moreover, we had few data on fathers. One cannot assume that fathers are equivalent to mothers as socialisation agents (Parke, 1995). The ways fathers differ from mothers in their socialisation styles and contributions to children's moral development are important areas for future research.

Finally, the use of children's self-report measures of empathy and sympathy may have been problematic. It may be more socially acceptable for girls to report the experience of negative emotion or concern in response to others' distress than it is for boys (Lennon & Eisenberg, 1987). Replication of our findings using facial or physiological measures of empathy or sympathy would offer more objective evidence for the relation between parents' socialisation and children's moral emotions (although such data would measure situational, rather than dispositional, sympathy).

None the less, the findings in this study support other work in documenting the role of parental (especially mothers') emotion in interactions with children. The picture that emerges from these findings is that parenting behaviours that are warm and supportive are likely to promote children's empathic concern and moral behaviour. Parenting that is responsive and includes positive affect may promote children's acceptance of parents' socialisation efforts in regard to moral standards. Although one can not draw firm conclusions about the long-term consequences of parenting on children's moral functioning from this investigation, it is possible that
supportive parenting promotes children's long-term empathic concern and has a lasting impact on the course of children's moral behaviour.

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NOTES

[1] Children's positive affect and negative affect also were coded during the novel and frustrating situations (inter-rater reliabilities ranged from 0.78 to 0.98) and were averaged within and across procedures to create child positive and negative affect scores. Partial correlations were conducted to determine the relation between parents' positive affect (controlling for children's positive affect) and parents' negative affect (controlling for children's negative affect) to children's moral affect and behaviour. In general, results did not change after controlling for children's affect. However, the relation between parents' negative affect and children's (specifically, boys') cheating reduced to marginal significance, r(111) = 0.16, P<0.08 and the relation between parents' negative affect and boys' sympathy also reduced to marginal significance, r(111) = −0.16, P<0.08.

[2] To determine whether there were differences in parental style for children who never cheated (n = 15) versus children who spent at least some time cheating (n = 197), ANOVAs with cheat status and child's sex as grouping factors and parental style as the dependent measures were tested. Results showed a main effect for cheat group for parental positive affect, F(1, 208) = 15.57, P<0.001 and parental encouragement, F(1, 208) = 6.92, P<0.009. Parents of children who never cheated were more positive and encouraging than were parents of children who cheated. Furthermore, a significant interaction between cheat group and child's sex was found for parental encouragement, F(1,208) = 3.83, P<0.05. Follow-up Tukey analyses revealed that parents of boys who never cheated were more encouraging (M = 4.33) than were parents of boys (M = 2.93) and girls (M = 2.81) who cheated on the puzzle task.

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