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Emotion Socialization and Ethnicity: An Examination of Practices and Outcomes in African American, Asian American, and Latin American Families

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The current review paper summarizes the literature on parental emotion socialization in ethnically diverse families in the United States. Models of emotion socialization have been primarily developed using samples of European American parents and children. As such, current categorizations of “adaptive” and “maladaptive” emotion socialization practices may not be applicable to individuals from different ethnic backgrounds. The review examines current models of emotion socialization, with particular attention paid to the demographic breakdown of the studies used to develop these models. Additionally, the review highlights studies examining emotion socialization practices in African American, Asian American, and Latin American families. The review is synthesized with summarizing themes of similarities and differences across ethnic groups, and implications for culturally sensitive research and practice are discussed.

A plethora of research has examined the methods by which parents engage in emotion socialization [1]. Emotion socialization includes caregiver behaviors, both overt and covert, that influence which emotions youth experience, youths’ decisions to express or suppress emotional expressions, and how they go about expressing emotions [2]. Parental emotion socialization has significant implications for children’s socioe-

motional functioning. For example, emotion socialization practices have been linked to youth socioemotional development [1], and distinct variants of emotion socialization practices have been identified in families of youth with psychopathology (e.g., anxiety and depression) [3]. Previous research has contributed to our understanding of youth emotional development and outcomes when such development goes awry. Yet signifi-

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†Abbreviations: SES, socio-economic status.

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cant gaps in our knowledge remain. Specifically, the bulk of this literature has been approached from a monoculturalist perspective, focusing on parenting behavior in European American families from predominately upper to middle class. The frequent use of such a narrow demographic sample makes it difficult to know which models of emotion socialization generalize to diverse samples. The goal of this review is to examine the emotion socialization literature from a multicultural perspective.

In hopes of learning ways to enhance child adaptation, several investigators have examined determinants of emotion socialization as well as pathways and contexts by which these links occur. Two prominent research groups in particular have delineated tripartite models for how emotion socialization may take place. The first group, Eisenberg, Cumberland, and Spinrad, published a seminal review demarcating three modes of *parental* emotion socialization: parental reactions to children's emotion expression, discussion of emotion, and expression of emotion [4]. In a similar vein, Morris and colleagues outlined a tripartite model of socialization specific to the family context and children's emotion regulation. In their model, they argue for the following modes of *family* emotion socialization: modeling/observation, emotion parenting practices, and emotional climate in the family [5]. Taken together, however, these theoretical models support the notion that both family climate and emotion parenting behaviors influence children's development of emotional competence. The following sections use a socio-cultural perspective to review research that examined emotion socialization (family climate and maternal emotion parenting behaviors specifically) in ethnically diverse groups.

EMOTION SOCIALIZATION IN AFRICAN AMERICAN SAMPLES

Before reviewing the literature examining emotion socialization in African American families, it is first important to describe the socio-cultural context of what it might mean to be African American in the United

States. Though we acknowledge the individuals identifying as African American make up a heterogeneous group, there are certain common themes or experience that seem influential to the group at large. The history of slavery, racism, prejudice, and discrimination against African American individuals is a context that cannot be ignored. It is only relatively recently that African Americans have been given the same legal rights as European Americans in the United States, and despite those rights, African Americans still experience prejudice and discrimination. Another important context is socio-economic status (SES†). The poverty rate among African Americans is twice as high as the poverty rate for European Americans, and African American individuals are twice as likely to be unemployed when compared to European Americans [6].

Another important context to consider when examining emotion socialization in African Americans is family composition and values. Single parent households are more common in African American families compared with European American families, and one study found that 60 percent of African American babies are born to single mothers [6]. In addition, African American families often stress extended family connections and spirituality more than European American families and tend to be more matriarchal [6].

Family Climate

Several studies were found that examined emotion climate in African American families. One study examined maternal supportiveness (defined as parental sensitivity, cognitive stimulation, and positive regard toward the child) as it relates to toddlers' emotion regulation abilities across 3 years in a sample of low-income African American families whose toddlers attended Early Head Start [7]. Assessments included behavioral observations of parent-child interactions (to assess parental support) and rating scales of children's emotion regulation when the child was 1, 2, and 3 years old. Results demonstrated that maternal supportiveness longitudinally predicted child emotion regulation. Further, rates of change over

time (slope) of maternal supportiveness predicted the rate of change in children's emotion regulation. In other words, children of mothers high in supportiveness showed more rapid increases in emotion regulation abilities over time compared to children of mothers low in supportiveness. The authors concluded that their construct of supportiveness might reflect a "subtle" form of socialization through which children may or may not (in the context of low supportiveness) learn important emotion-related competencies such as how to manage emotions.

Another study with African American mothers and their preschool-aged children found that family climates characterized by negative emotional expressivity were positively related to boys' aggressive behavior [8]. Additionally, children raised in families with higher levels of negative emotional climate engaged in less teacher-rated cognitive distraction (e.g., thinking about something besides the problem). Maternal empathy was negatively related to teacher-reported child aggressive coping strategies (e.g., hitting another child) and positively related to teacher-reported child avoidant coping strategies (e.g., leaving a distressing situation). Maternal child-focused reactions to their child's negative emotions was negatively associated with avoidant coping and girls' instrumental action coping (e.g., problem-solving). Child-focused reactions have been associated with adaptive child outcomes in studies with European American mothers, so the finding that this emotion parenting behavior was associated with decreased levels of adaptive child coping was unexpected. The authors speculated that, for their sample, maternal child-focused reactions may limit opportunities for the child to learn how to self-regulate their behavior when emotionally aroused.

A study by Cunningham and colleagues examined the relations between maternal emotion parenting philosophy, children's emotion understanding and regulation, and adjustment outcomes in a sample of African American youth (ages 9-13) living in high violence city neighborhoods [9]. The authors formed a composite variable of emotion parenting philosophy based on maternal

awareness of her child's emotions, acceptance of her child's emotions, acceptance of her own emotions, and emotion coaching behaviors. Results demonstrated that mothers' positive emotion parenting philosophies were positively related to adaptive child emotional outcomes (i.e., understanding and regulation), which, in turn, were positively related to adaptive outcomes (e.g., grades, social skills) and negatively related to maladaptive outcomes (e.g., internalizing and externalizing symptoms).

Emotion Parenting Behaviors

Studies examining specific emotion parenting behaviors in African American families are scarce. One study by Garner sought to examine relations between maternal behaviors (including but not limited to emotion parenting behaviors) and child socio-emotional outcomes in a sample of African American mothers and preschoolers [10]. The study aimed to differentiate between effects due to SES and those due to ethnicity (i.e., African American group membership). Observational methods were employed to assess children's emotional and social competencies with peers at school and maternal parenting behaviors at home with their child. Mothers' emotion-related behaviors (e.g., engagement in emotion discussions) were positively related to children's emotion regulation abilities.

A study by Smith and Walden found links between maternal emotion socialization and child behavioral regulation in emotionally arousing situations in a sample of African American preschoolers and their mothers [8]. Specifically, they found that maternal empathy was positively associated with children's emotion understanding and negatively associated with aggressive behavior. Contrary to research documenting detrimental outcomes for punitive/negative emotion parenting behaviors for European American families [11], results demonstrated that punitive and minimizing maternal reactions to children's negative emotions were *positively* related to girls' adaptive coping and *negatively* related to boys' aggressive behavior in African American families [8].

A similar study examined whether emotion socialization behaviors of European American and African American mothers related differently to child outcomes [12]. Mothers self-reported on their reactions to their kindergarten-aged child's negative emotions, and teachers reported on children's academic and social-emotional outcomes. Results demonstrated that maternal problem-focused (e.g., efforts to help a child problem-solve a solution to whatever is making them upset) reactions were positively related to adaptive outcomes for European American children but not African American children. Conversely, emotion-focused reactions (e.g., efforts to distract an upset child by talking about happy things) were negatively related to adaptive outcomes for African American children but not European American children. Put together, the results of these studies highlight that "adaptive" is an ethnically bound label. Emotion parenting behaviors deemed adaptive in European American literature cannot be assumed to generalize to other samples without further research.

EMOTION SOCIALIZATION IN ASIAN AMERICAN SAMPLES

There are more than 40 distinct subgroups of the Asian American population that differ in immigration experiences, values, religion, and language [13]. Though we acknowledge the individuals identifying as Asian American make up a heterogeneous group, there are certain common themes or experience that seem influential to the group at large. Asian American individuals in the United States are surrounded by a history of racism and discrimination and continue to face anti-Asian messages and prejudice [6]. Additionally, there are certain subgroups of Asian Americans (e.g., Hmong, Guamanian, Cambodian) who have disproportionately high levels of unemployment and low levels of higher education degrees [6]. In addition to combating stereotypes, Asian Americans are often faced with the challenge of speaking multiple languages. Specifically, on a recent U.S. census, 79 per-

cent of the individuals identifying as Asian American reported speaking a language other than English at home [14]. In a similar vein, Asian Americans often face issues of acculturation that European Americans do not have to face. For example, research has highlighted the presence of acculturation conflicts between parents and children, particularly in families in which parents are first or second-generation U.S. residents but the children were born and raised in the United States [15].

Another important context to consider when examining emotion socialization in Asian Americans is family composition and values. Asian families tend to have a collectivistic orientation characterized by a dedication to group harmony and family honor [16]. Additionally, Asian families tend to be based on hierarchical and patriarchal relationships such that men and older adults are often shown the most respect and communication flows down from the top of the social hierarchy to the bottom (i.e., children) [17].

Family Climate

The only studies found examining emotion socialization in Asian American families relied on young adults' retrospective reports of their family emotion climate and parental emotion socialization behaviors during childhood. The limited research base highlights the need for more prospective research examining these constructs. Despite the limitations of retrospective design, the following studies shed light on patterns of emotion socialization in Asian American families.

A study by Lau and colleagues examined ethnic differences in emotional attunement and social anxiety in Asian American and European American young adults [18]. The authors hypothesized that Asian Americans would report childhood experiences marked by more interdependent emotional motivation (e.g., restraint of negative emotions, awareness of others' emotional states) than European Americans. Results demonstrated that Asian Americans reported more concerns about breaking socially sanctioned roles (concerns that fall under the construct

“loss of face”) and that their early emotional environments were marked with shaming and love withdrawal more than European Americans. Only “loss of face” concerns mediated the link between ethnicity and social anxiety (Asian Americans reported higher mean levels of social anxiety compared to European Americans). Family emotion climates marked by shaming and love withdrawal did not help explain the link between ethnicity and social anxiety.

Another study examined the link between retrospectively reported family emotion climate variables (in childhood) and current (young adulthood) emotion regulation and psychological symptomology [19]. Asian American participants reported fewer displays of positive emotions in their childhood homes compared to African American and European American participants. Interestingly, low positive affect did not relate to negative emotional/psychological outcomes for Asian Americans, whereas it did for African American and European American participants. The authors speculated that low positive affect in Asian American homes was not associated with detrimental outcomes because it likely fit within a larger cultural context of values and customs. Both of these studies illustrate that family emotion environments vary by ethnicity, and value judgments placed on one family emotion climate cannot be generalized across ethnic groups.

Emotion Parenting Behaviors

A study conducted by Le and colleagues had European American, Asian American, and Malaysian college students report on their current levels of alexithymia (i.e., a deficiency in understanding, processing, or describing emotions) and retrospectively report on parental socialization behaviors [20]. Results demonstrated that both Asian American and Malaysian participants reported higher levels of alexithymia than European Americans. Additionally, Asian Americans reported that their parents showed less physical affection and less positive emotion talk than European Americans. The authors did not examine whether mean

differences in alexithymia or parental socialization behaviors were associated with differing outcomes, so no conclusions can be made regarding whether certain parenting behaviors are more adaptive than others. The authors did find, however, that parental socialization behaviors mediated the link between culture (i.e., identifying as European American, Asian American, or Malaysian) and alexithymia levels.

One study that did examine emotional outcomes was Saw and Okazaki’s study on European American and Asian American college students [21]. In this study, students reported on their current levels of emotional distress and retrospectively reported on their parents’ emotion socialization practices. Results demonstrated that Asian Americans reported higher levels of parental discouragement of emotional expression, whereas European Americans reported higher levels of parental openness toward emotional expression. Additionally, there was a significant positive relation between parental encouragement of emotional suppression and social anxiety for Asian Americans. There was not a positive relation between parental encouragement of emotional suppression and depression for Asian Americans. This finding was contrary to the authors’ hypothesis, which they developed based on research with European American samples. These findings highlight the need for ecologically valid models of emotion socialization.

EMOTION SOCIALIZATION IN LATIN AMERICAN SAMPLES

Consistent with other marginalized groups in the United States, knowledge about Latin Americans can offer considerable insight into factors influencing emotion socialization practices in these groups. Most importantly, it is important to note that the umbrella term “Latin American” comprises several different ethnic groups (e.g., Mexican American, Puerto Rican, Dominican American). At the same time, research on specific groups is limited, and thus the current review will focus on the broader Latin American cultural group. Latin American individuals have much higher rates of poverty

than their European American counterparts (21.4 percent versus 7.8 percent) [6]. Also worth noting is the fact that many Latin Americans living in the United States are undocumented (11 million), and documentation status likely plays a role in the aforementioned poverty rate and also in the fact that unemployment is as high as 8.1 percent (versus 5.1 percent in European Americans) [6]. Additionally, Latin Americans experience higher levels of discrimination in comparison to European Americans, which may in turn lead to greater levels of experienced negative emotions, stress, and pressure to modulate particular emotional experiences.

Investigating emotion socialization factors in Latin American families requires examining such constructs within the socio-cultural context. More specifically, several cultural factors likely influence the socialization of emotion in youth. Latin American families can often be characterized by *familismo*, which reflects the role of the family in Latin American culture [6]. There is a strong focus on extended family ties as well as family loyalty. As such, certain pressures may exist related to emotion expression in order to keep family cohesion. Further, the notion of *respeto* is also a central theme in Latin American families. *Respeto* highlights family hierarchy and gender roles. We may thus expect socialization practices to differ based on gender stereotypes and other agents of socialization. Family harmony and respect in Latin American families may play a large role in the presence/absence of negative emotion expression (e.g., a child expressing anger toward her father) and resulting socialization practices.

Family Climate

In terms of family climate, the aforementioned ideals of *familismo* and *respeto* appear to be key factors in guiding the emotional climate within the home. Another important factor is the role of the child within the family context. It has been argued that in comparison to European American families, children in Latin American families are considered to be more dependent on family members for a longer period of time. In one

study, for example, Savage and Gauvain indicated that European American families attributed greater problem-solving abilities for their children at a younger age, whereas Mexican American families believed that younger children needed more guidance before developing better problem-solving abilities [22]. These findings are important in that they suggest that Latin American families may provide greater structure for children, including in terms of discussion emotional experiences.

Further research indicates that overall perception of the role of emotions may have significant implications for how emotions are socialized by parents and the family. Perez-Rivera and Dunsmore, for example, examined perceptions of emotions as valuable versus as dangerous [23]. The authors found that mothers who endorsed European American values (e.g., individualism) believed emotions were less dangerous in comparison with mothers who endorsed Latin American values (e.g., *familismo*). These findings are consistent with the notion that particular emotions may create instability within the family structure. As such, we expect that emotions expected to jeopardize family harmony would be regulated to a greater degree than emotions that are not perceived as dangerous.

Emotion Parenting Behaviors

In regard to specific emotion parenting behaviors, few studies have examined these behaviors in solely Latin American samples or in comparison with European American samples. Nonetheless, from the studies reviewed below, it appears that significant differences may exist in how families from differing ethnic backgrounds socialize emotion in youth. For example, in their study looking at parental discussion of emotion, Perez-Rivera and Dunsmore found that mothers with stronger Latin American values reported greater beliefs in guiding their child's emotional experience. In contrast, European American mothers reported greater support for autonomy to allow children to learn about emotions. Additionally, these differing beliefs imply differences in how emo-

tions were labeled and/or explained. Importantly, however, the authors found that mothers with stronger Latin American values had children who demonstrated less emotion understanding. It is worth noting, as the authors point out, that emotion understanding was assessed using The Puppet Interview (developed by Denham), a measure that was developed using primarily White samples. As such, it is not clear whether the current finding is an artifact of the emotion understanding measures used.

Another study conducted by Chung and colleagues examined parental warmth in families with depressed adolescents [24]. As suggested by Coyne's model of depression, it is expected that adolescent depressive mood would erode parental warmth over time. The authors demonstrated that this pattern was in fact the case for European American families, but not for Latin American families. This finding suggests that Latin American families do not appear to be as sensitive to adolescent mood (i.e., reduce parental warmth in response to adolescent depressive mood) in comparison to non-Latin samples. It is unclear why this is the case, but it may be that the notion of *familismo* and additional support offered by extended family members may buffer against the negative effect of adolescent negative and depressed mood. Additional research is necessary to explicate this finding.

THEMES OF SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES IN EMOTION SOCIALIZATION

The emotion socialization literature previously reviewed reveals various cultural themes that are likely central to the study of emotion socialization in ethnically diverse samples. Halberstadt and Lozada wrote a seminal review regarding emotional development through four cultural lenses: individualism/collectivism, power distance, children's place in the family, and the value of emotional experiences [25]. The following section will use the four lenses delineated in Halberstadt and Lozada's review and apply them to the literature examining

family emotion climate and emotion parenting behaviors in families of children ranging from preschool to young adulthood.

The notion of individualism versus collectivism is a relatively prominent concept, particularly when discussing Asian American and Latin American cultures. Within the collectivistic-individualistic milieu, individualistic contexts emphasize personal goals, personal achievement, material gains, unique personality characteristics, and high self-esteem [26]. Collectivistic contexts emphasize social harmony, community, humility, and achievement that honors the group/family [27]. In terms of emotional experiences and displays, research has indicated that individuals from collectivistic cultures tend to exert greater restraint over their emotional displays than individuals from individualistic cultures [28]. Given the collectivistic goal of group harmony common among Asian Americans, there is a tendency for certain emotions to be suppressed in Asian American families. For example, Asian American families often report lower levels of overt displays of positive emotions than European Americans, though some studies have suggested that there are similar levels of underlying warmth [20,29].

The second theme of power distance refers to power differentials between family members [25]. In some cases, the familial power structure is defined by horizontality, while in others it is defined by a vertical hierarchy. In the context of the vertical structure, children may be encouraged to be obedient. It may also be the case that male adult figures are at the top of the hierarchy followed by female adult figures and children. European American family structure has historically been vertical, but there have been major shifts in family structures and values over the past few decades [30]. For example, the traditional "nuclear" family seen in the mid-20th century is becoming less prevalent, and there has been a shift away from pure patriarchal marital roles as women in the United States have increasingly had access to higher education and equal opportunity employment. In Asian American families, the family structure is

typically vertical with adult males as the head of the household. Within this framework, authoritarian parenting styles are common and respect toward elders is a value expected from Asian American children [29]. As a result, it seems that Asian American mothers tend to engage in more strict and less expressive emotion parenting behaviors [18,20] than European American parents. It is expected that such ethnic differences are a function of the interaction between power differentials in families as well as values subscribed to by each ethnic group. Research is mixed on whether such parenting practices are associated with detrimental outcomes for children, though there seem to be few documented detrimental outcomes of the seemingly (compared to European American norms) restrictive emotion parenting styles common in Asian American families. Similarly to the hierarchy seen in Asian American families, Latin American families exhibit a vertical structure with adult males as the head of the household. As such, children are socialized to obey and respect these figures and may thus inhibit expressions of anger toward those figures [31]. Overall, in Latin American families, there may be greater pressures to socialize and encourage the inhibition of displays of anger so as to keep the family structure intact. More research is needed on how family structure affects emotion socialization dynamics, particularly as the number of inter-ethnic group relationships is on the rise.

The third theme, children's place in the family, refers to the family structure and the role that children play within that structure [25]. When considering how children fit into the family structure, it is important to consider how socialization behaviors may differ depending on the nature of the relationship between adult family members and children. As described above, African American and Asian American parents tend to use more authoritarian parenting styles, marked by strict expectations and low warmth, compared to European American parents [29,32]. One explanation for this phenomenon among African American families is that historically and presently African

Americans have been victims of discrimination and are therefore at a greater risk for being victimized. As a result, African American parents use "stricter" (than European American parents) methods of child-rearing to help keep their child safe. Such parenting is often considered reflective of care and concern [33]. Some authors have speculated that the value of collectivism and hierarchical relationship structure common among Asian Americans results in a parenting style aimed to teach children respect for elders as well as strategies for maintaining group harmony and downplaying individual needs [20]. In Latin American families, children's roles can be understood from through the concepts of *familismo* and *simpatia*. *Simpatia* refers to a value on family harmony that is common in Latin American culture [34]. In families with these values, there may be a tendency for parents to be more involved in their child's emotional development compared to families without these values [23]. This pattern of involvement and warmth consistent with *familismo* and *simpatia* is also apparent the study that demonstrated Latin American parents of depressed adolescents showed more warmth toward their child over time than European American parents [24].

Lastly, the fourth theme of value of emotional experience and expression provides considerable support for the notion that emotion socialization practices need to be interpreted from the standpoint of the respective socio-cultural context. Specifically, cultural perspectives on the function and value of emotions provide the foundational framework by which cultures determine how emotions are to be socialized in youth. For example, it may be that cultural values ascribe individualistic tendencies to the expression of particular emotion (e.g., anger and pride). In such a case, a culture with collectivistic values would not be supportive of expressing those emotions. Not only do cultural values directly influence parental emotion socialization practices, but they also provide a particular ecosystem where values about emotional experiences are communicated (e.g., children's books).

SUMMARY AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Overall, there are a handful of studies examining emotion socialization in African American, Asian American, and Latin American families that serve as pieces to the larger puzzle of understanding emotion socialization as embedded within socio-cultural context. We examined ethnicity as one context in which emotion socialization occurs. The existing literature is a first step toward building a foundation of culturally sensitive research. Various limitations of the existing studies temper the conclusions that can be drawn regarding emotion socialization across ethnic groups. Thus, there are several ways in which research can be improved in order to strengthen our empirical understanding of emotion socialization.

First, many studies did not consider the psychometric issues related to using measures developed on primarily European American samples with individuals from different ethnic groups. Thus, the majority of studies assumed the measures and assessments used with diverse ethnic groups functioned similarly as they would for European American samples, yet no studies investigating emotion socialization specifically looked for metric invariance. Therefore, future research should take a step back to ensure that the assessment tools being used to investigate emotion socialization are appropriate for various ethnic groups. This could entail qualitative research that fuels measure development followed by psychometric evaluation. A less time-consuming alternative would be to conduct confirmatory factor analyses on measures (conduct separate models for different ethnic groups) before using those measures to look for mean differences between groups.

Another limitation noted across studies was the relatively limited information regarding acculturation and or ethnic identity. Most studies did not specify whether participants had immigrated to the United States in their lifetime or how long their family had been in the United States. Similarly, none of the reviewed studies examined ethnic identity (or how much an individual identifies

with their specified ethnic group) in the analyses, nor did any study discuss individuals who identify as being members of multiple ethnic groups. As such, the construct of ethnicity as reviewed in these studies is likely an oversimplified one that ignores individual differences that are likely relevant to emotion socialization practices and related outcomes. Future research would benefit from investigating variables for which ethnicity is a proxy. For example, levels of collectivistic values versus individualistic values, acculturation, immigration status, spirituality, family structure, and views on children's roles are all variables that could be included in future studies to better understand where and why there are differences in emotion socialization behaviors.

The literature is also limited by its relatively narrow focus on maternal emotion socialization. It is necessary to consider the role of fathers and other primary caregivers (e.g., grandparents, older siblings) when evaluating emotion socialization contexts surrounding children's emotional development. Additionally, more research is needed examining the unique role of child and caregiver gender on emotion socialization interactions.

Based on the existing literature on emotion socialization practices within differing ethnic groups, it appears that there are no emotion parenting behaviors that are deemed always adaptive or always maladaptive. Thus, it seems that appropriateness of different emotion socialization techniques depends on the context. Future research is needed to further delineate what aspects of ethnicity (and other contextual factors) determine whether certain practices are associated with (mal)adaptive outcomes. Additionally, more research is needed to examine outcomes of different emotion parenting techniques to better understand the process through which certain techniques lead (or do not lead) to adaptive trajectories. Though the conclusions made from this review are tempered by the limitations of the studies reviewed, it seems appropriate to conclude that there is no "one size fits all" emotion parenting style. Researchers and

clinicians must be cautious in pathologizing parenting practices that have been deemed maladaptive based on research using primarily European American samples. Instead, efforts must be made to better understand the contexts in which emotion socialization (and the child-parent interactions) are embedded.

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