

Gender differences in the emotion regulation of children and the role of parental involvement

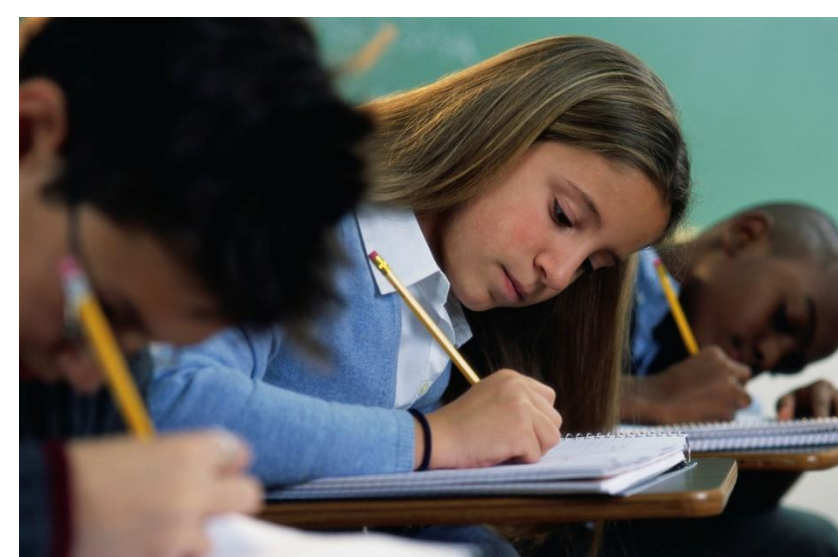
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Introduction

Previous research has shown that effective emotion regulation is important in all aspects of daily life and especially critical to the development of children (Gross 2007). Academic functioning is a critical domain of functioning in children (Gumora 2002), and thus the aim of this project was to explore emotion regulation in this context. Many researchers have begun investigating the development of emotion regulation in children, however, they have not yet established whether gender differences exist. Previous research has also indicated that parental involvement has an impact on the development of emotion regulation in children (Morris 2007). The objective of this study is to first establish gender differences in emotion regulation among typically developing children, and further to explore the role of parental involvement in these differences. The approach chosen to address this question is to look at the different types of involvement of parents with their male or female children in terms of their schoolwork and determine, if and how, this involvement affects the child's emotion regulation.

Methodology

Data was collected from 825 children, aged 13-14 years old, at various schools in Montreal. They were administered various questionnaires such as the Perceptions of Parents Scale (POPS) and the Difficulty in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS) during a two hour session in a group setting and volunteers were present to help answer questions. The POPS was used to assess children's perceptions of their parent's involvement in homework. Items were answered using a Likert scale, where 1 was "very little" and 5 was "very much". Combining items led to a total score for controlling and supportive involvement for both parents together, and subscores for mothers and fathers for each involvement type. The DERS was used to measure emotion regulation. The scores added up to a total out of 100 and several different subscores relating to specific emotion regulation skills. Items were answered using a Likert scale, where 1 is "never" and 5 is "always". The academic outcome measure will not be described because it is not included in this analysis. In the first set of data, the independent variable is the gender of the child and the dependent variable is emotion regulation. In the second set of data, the independent variable is the gender of the child and of the parent and the dependent variable is the supportive or controlling involvement.



Results

There are significant differences in the emotion regulation of typically developing children, aged 13-14 years, based on gender, $F(1, 799) = 8.99, p < 0.01$. As Figure 1 shows, girls scored significantly higher than boys on the DERS measure meaning that girls have more difficulty with emotion regulation than boys.

The perceived amount of control or support used by mothers and fathers on the basis of the child's gender was tested. This was done separately for mothers and fathers. For mothers, there was a significant effect of the gender of the child on the perceived amount of control used, $F(1, 647) = 23.26, p < 0.01$. For fathers, there was also a significant effect of the gender of the child on the perceived amount of control used, $F(1, 634) = 19.84, p < 0.01$. As Figure 2 shows, both parents used significantly more control with their sons than their daughters. Results indicate that there are no significant differences between the perceived amounts of support used based on the gender of the child as can be seen in Figure 3.

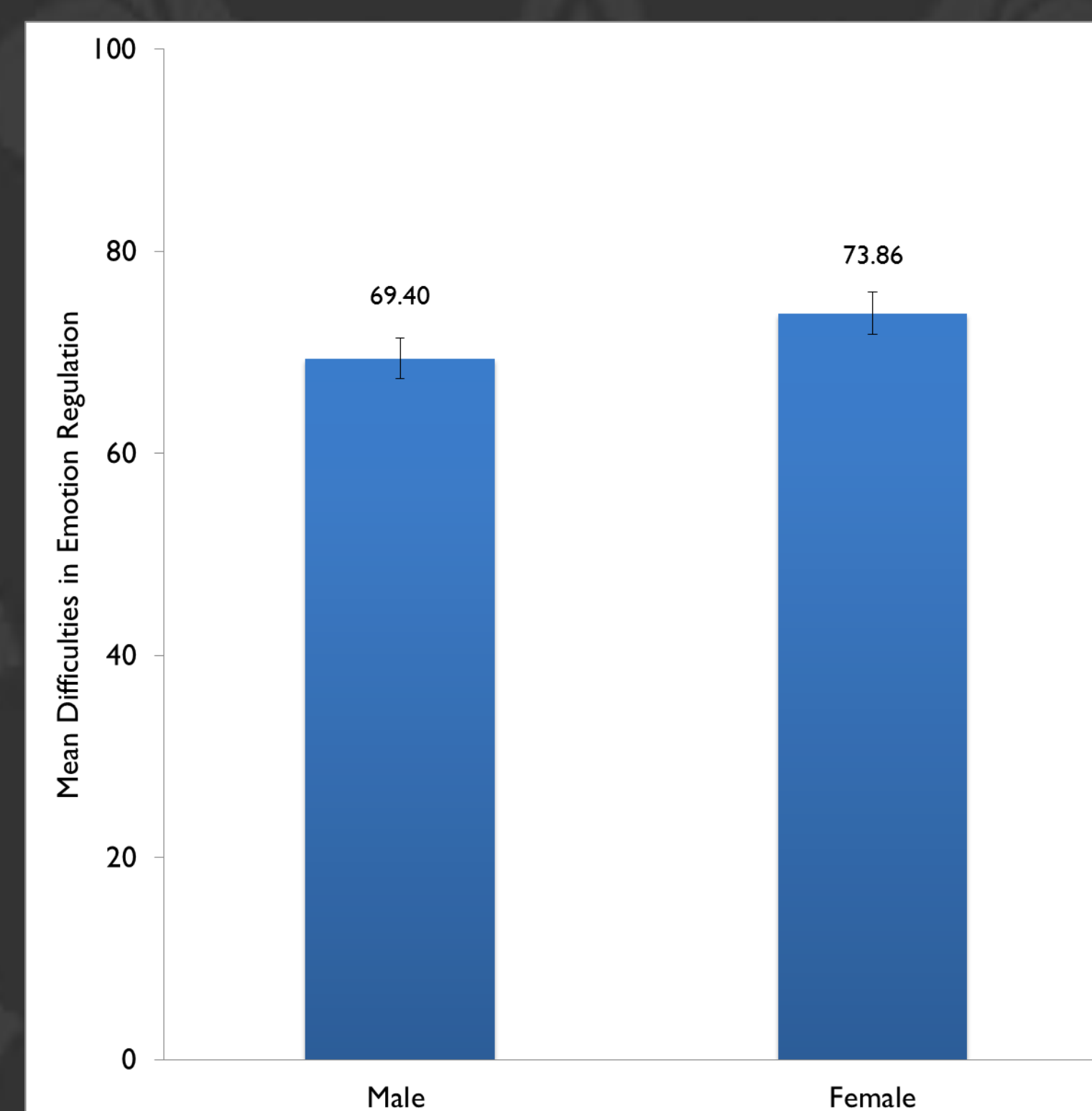


Figure 1. Mean difficulties in emotion regulation based on DERS scores for male and female children

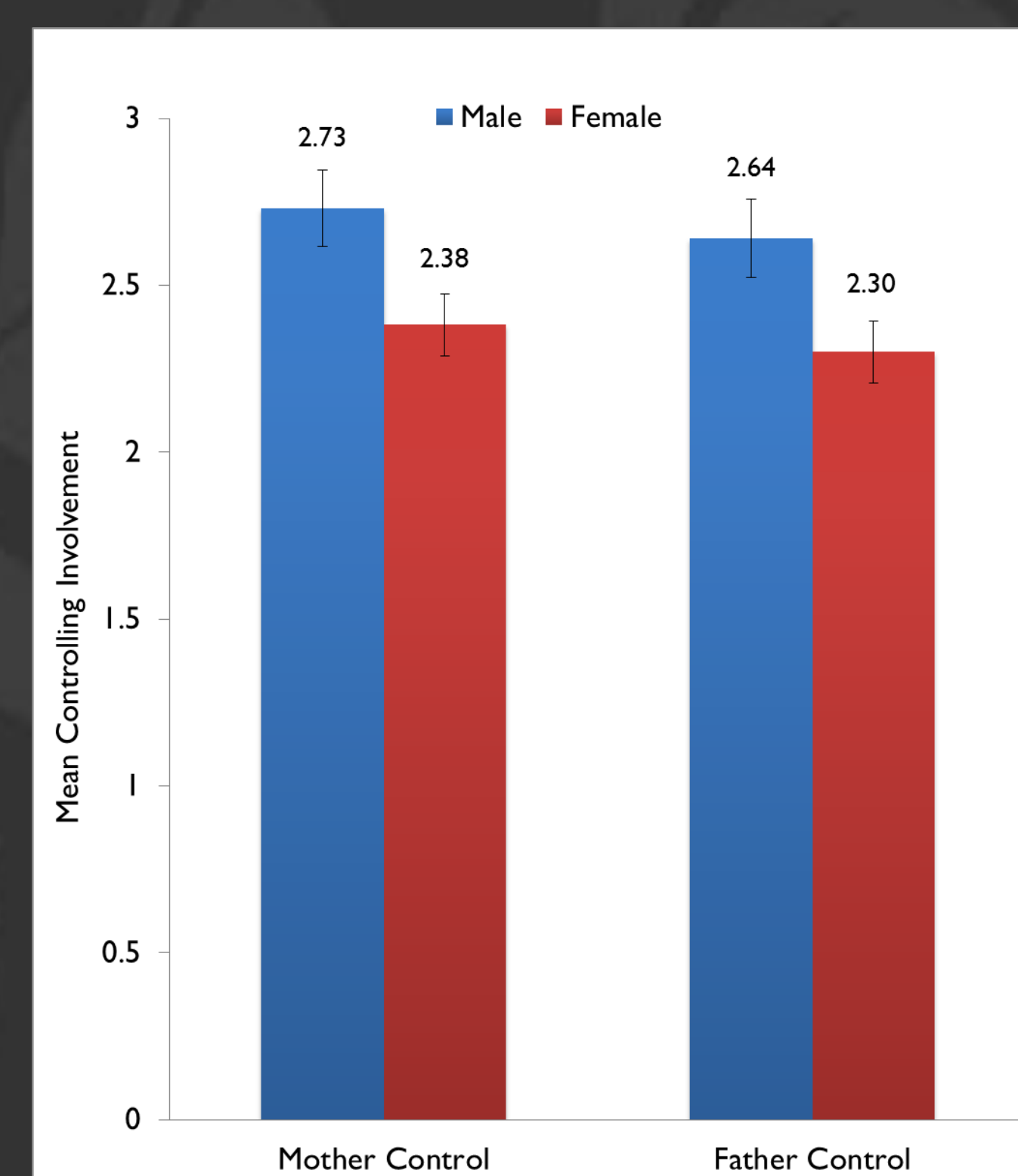


Figure 2. Mean controlling involvement of mothers and fathers based on POPS subscores with their male and female children

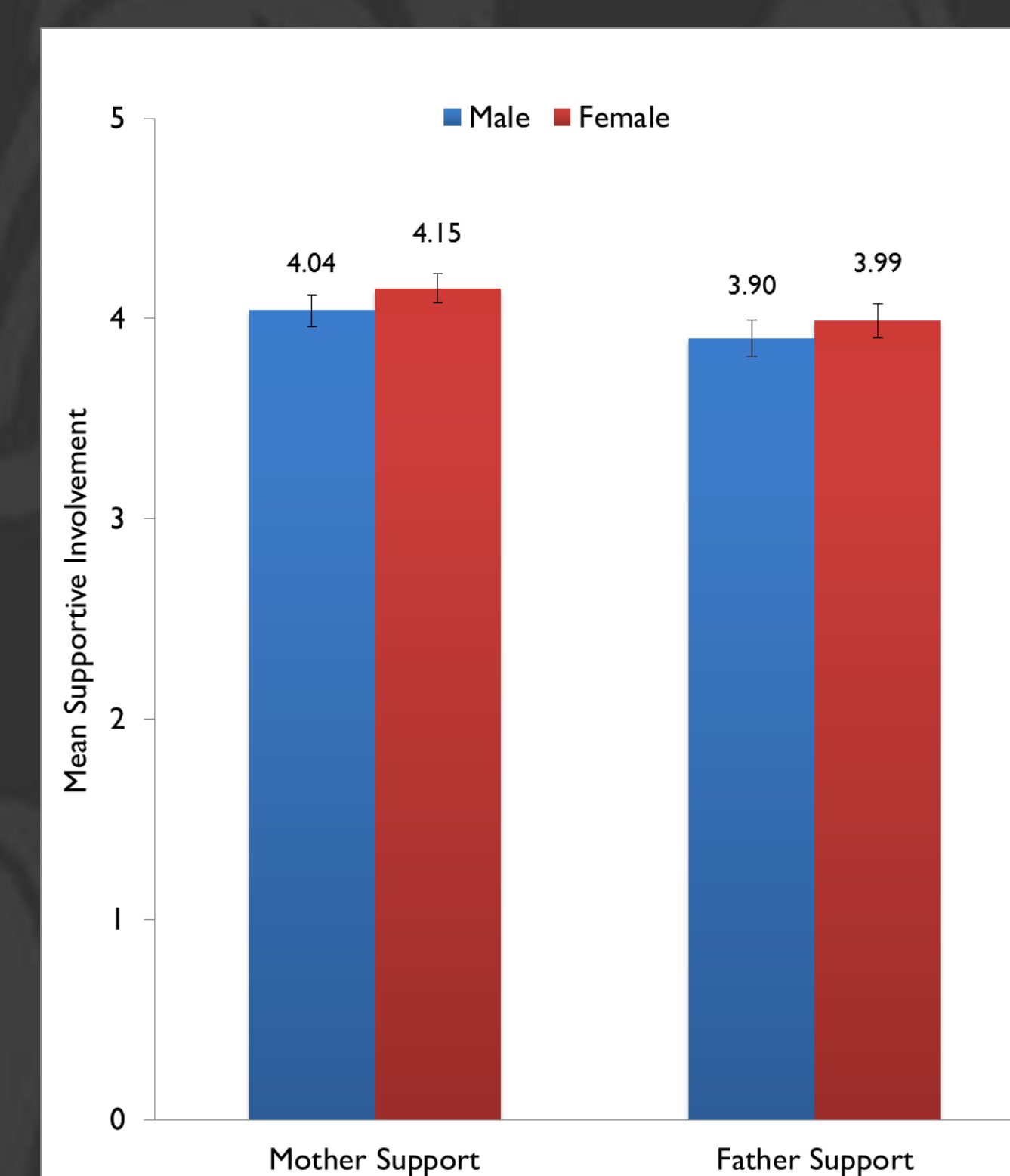


Figure 3. Mean supportive involvement of mothers and fathers based on POPS subscores with their male and female children

Discussion

In this study, gender differences in emotion regulation were successfully established. An interesting finding is that boys on average scored lower on the DERS measure than girls indicating that they are better at emotion regulation than girls. This information contradicts the existing research on adults that indicates that men and women both tend to have the same level of emotion regulation while the methods used for emotion regulation may be different (McRae et al. 2008). This difference may be due to the children in this study being 13-14 years old, an age at which girls tend to enter puberty and are dealing with all the changes that come with it (Yurgelun-Todd 2007). These changes may be responsible for the girls' higher scores on the DERS.



There seems to be a distinct difference between the controlling and supportive involvement that parents use. Both parents use significantly more control with their sons rather than their daughters while both parents use around the same support for both sons and daughters. This suggests that the two types of involvement, controlling and supportive, are not two ends of a spectrum but are rather two different parenting styles. This is also an interesting finding because it seems to contradict past research on this topic which indicates the parents tend to use significantly more support with their daughters than with their sons (Muller 1998).



The findings of this study indicate that parental involvement does impact emotion regulation development in children and this can serve as a starting point for further research pertaining to emotion regulation in children.

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