

QUARTET

Positive affect regulation in youth: Taking stock and moving forward

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Abstract

This article summarizes the four articles in the *Social Development* quartet focused on positive affect regulation in youth. Each article in the quartet shows that parents' socialization of youth positive affect (e.g., encouraging, enhancing, savoring, or dampening responses) is associated with youth positive affect regulation and depressive symptoms. Further, three of the studies provide novel evidence for an indirect relationship whereby parental socialization predicts youth depressive symptoms through youth positive affect regulation. The studies include samples of youth across mid-childhood and adolescence (7–18-year-olds) from three countries (the United States, Belgium, and India), and utilize several methods of assessing youth positive affect regulation or parental socialization (parent-reported surveys, youth-reported surveys, coded parent–child discussions). This integrative article also identifies several ways in which the study of youth positive affect regulation can be advanced. We address the conceptualization of positive affect regulation and the socialization of children's positive affect, constraints on the adaptiveness of upregulating positive emotions, methodological directions, potential moderated effects based on child characteristics such as sex or temperament, and the importance of studying outcomes beyond depression.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Affect regulation is linked to the development of psychopathology, with most studies focusing on the regulation and expression of negative affect (NA). However, recent theoretical and empirical work suggests that the regulation and expression of positive affect (PA) is also associated with psychopathology (Bijttebier et al., 2012; Davis & Suveg, 2013; Gilbert, 2012; Khazanov & Ruscio, 2016; Kovacs et al., 2016). The studies in this quartet provide further evidence connecting PA regulation to youth depression, and collectively show that parent socialization of PA—particularly enhancing or savoring versus dampening—predicts children's own PA regulation and depression. Importantly, this quartet provides both cross-sectional (Fredrick, Mancini, & Luebbe, this issue) and longitudinal evidence (Moran, Root, Vizy, Wilson, & Gentzler, this issue; Nelis, Bastin, Raes, & Bijttebier, this issue; Raval, Luebbe, & Sathiyaseelan, this issue). The validity of these associations is bolstered by researchers' use of different methods to assess socialization, including parent-report (Moran et al.; Raval et al.), adolescent-report (Moran et al.; Nelis et al.), and observed discussions (Fredrick et al., Moran et al.). Additionally, three articles found novel evidence for indirect associations wherein parental socialization predicts children's PA regulation, which then predicts youth depressive symptoms (see Figure 1). Specifically, Fredrick et al. and Moran et al. found that maternal upregulation (enhancing or savoring) predicted lower youth depressive symptoms through youth enhancing or savoring, and Raval et al. found that parental socialization of dampening predicted higher adolescent depressive symptoms through youth dampening.

2 | TAKING STOCK

To recap each article, first, in a longitudinal study, Nelis and colleagues (this issue) found that maternal enhancing was positively predictive of 12–16-year-old adolescents' enhancing PA responses (i.e., savoring or strategies likely to increase PA) and lower depressive symptoms over time. Adolescent depressive symptoms also positively predicted maternal dampening and negatively predicted maternal enhancing, indicating the bidirectional nature

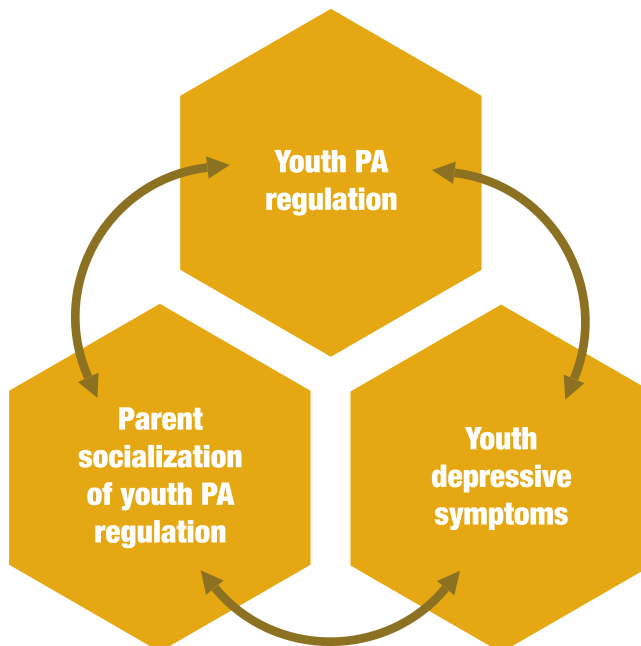


FIGURE 1 Model tested and supported in the quartet articles

of this process. Moreover, paternal enhancing was predictive of adolescent enhancing, but not adolescent depression. Thus, mothers and fathers may make unique types of contributions to adolescent PA regulation.

As most of the work on parental socialization of PA and child outcomes has been conducted with Western samples, Raval and colleagues (this issue) extended research by examining 13–18-year-old girls and their parents from India. Their study showed that parents' enhancing in response to girls' hypothetical PA predicted increases in adolescent PA rumination, and similarly, parents' dampening predicted increases in adolescent dampening PA. Further, parents' dampening was related to adolescent depression via adolescent dampening. Their findings may point to important cultural nuances in the socialization of PA, with dampening driving the socialization process in Southeast Asian samples and enhancing or savoring being a primary socialization method in Western samples.

The two other studies in this quartet also show that parents' enhancing or savoring socialization is associated with child and adolescent PA or savoring. Fredrick and colleagues' (this issue) observations of mothers and their 11–18-year-old adolescents showed that mothers' more positive (active-constructive) responses were associated with adolescents' effective PA regulation, which was linked to lower depressive symptoms. Importantly, the effects for maternal responses held even when controlling family PA expressions, maternal warmth, and observed mother PA. Finally, Moran and colleagues (this issue) assessed multiple forms of maternal socialization of 7–12-year-old children's PA regulation (maternal modeling of PA regulation, contingent responses to child PA, and coaching savoring and dampening). The results indicated that mothers' savoring predicted lower depressive symptoms in children at time 2 via children's own use of savoring, but only for the children who were higher in depression at time 1. Children's depressive symptoms also were concurrently linked with mothers' observed questioning their children's PA, child-reported mothers' coaching of dampening PA, and unexpectedly, mothers' report of their coaching savoring, which may indicate that mothers are attempting to counter their child's symptoms (Moran et al.). Taken together, these quartet articles are the first published reports linking parental PA socialization, youth PA regulation, and youth depressive symptoms (Figure 1). Below, we suggest several future directions for this line of research.

3 | MOVING FORWARD

3.1 | Expanding PA regulation within Gross' process model

The conceptualization of PA regulation can be advanced in several ways. As proposed in Gross's process model (1998), emotion regulation (ER) often occurs prior to the emotion. However, the quartet only focused on response-focused ER (although Moran et al. did attempt to code situation-focused ER). Applying other parts of the process model to children's regulation of PA as well as parents' socialization is an important future direction. For example, situation-based ER can include how children might seek out PA (or behave in ways that prevent it) and how parents create or modify situations to enhance children's PA and encourage upregulation (see Figure 2 for a specific example). These behaviors are likely quite common for parents, such as engaging in pleasurable leisure activities with their child, scheduling playdates for their young children, or modifying everyday activities to experience PA (e.g., singing songs in the car or creating a game out of errands; Fredrickson, 1998). In line with these ideas, Katz and colleagues (2014) have assessed a range of parental behaviors that include examples of situation selection and modification (e.g., facilitate their children's positive activities or interfere with the child's positive event).

Another consideration is to expand the measurement of dampening (e.g., thinking negative thoughts which decrease one's PA). Dampening is typically conceptualized as only a cognitive process (within the appraisal or response stage in Figure 2) in these papers and others (Feldman, Joormann, & Johnson, 2008; Gentzler, Morey, Palmer, & Yi, 2012; Wood, Heimpel, & Michela, 2003). Yet, other types of response-focused ER might be associated with negative outcomes, such as suppressing PA expressions (Gross & John, 2003), sharing one's PA by bragging (Palmer, Ramsey, Morey, & Gentzler, 2016), or activities that may produce short-term PA but with

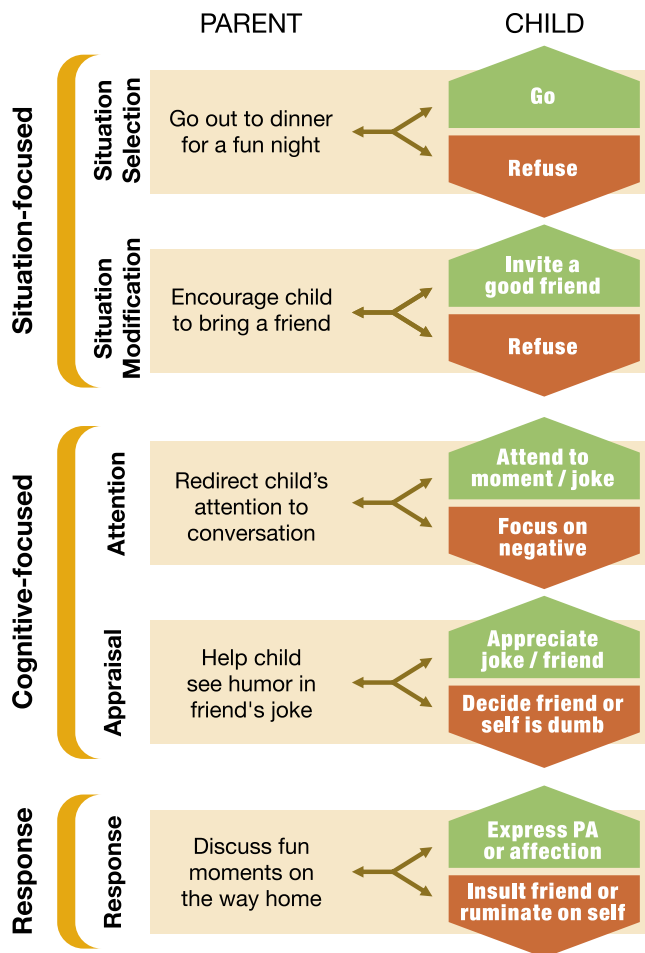


FIGURE 2 Hypothetical example applying the process model of emotion regulation (Gross, 1998) to: (1) parental socialization of upregulating children's positive affect regulation; and (2) child's positive affect regulation with upregulating and downregulating examples

maladaptive long-term effects (e.g., substance use or other indulgent behaviors; Livingstone & Srivastava, 2012). Additionally, although not considered active dampening, not being present or mindful in a positive situation (even if thinking of neutral things) may also be linked to more negative outcomes (Killingsworth & Gilbert, 2010). Finally, as mentioned, situation-focused child ER such as avoiding situations likely to elicit PA (see Figure 2) could result in less potential for PA.

3.2 | Expanding PA regulation beyond Gross' process model

There may also be benefits to PA regulation that precede a negative or positive situation (Quoidbach, Mikolajczak, & Gross, 2015). For example, Bryant and Veroff (2007) suggest that parents likely facilitate anticipatory savoring through everyday conversations (e.g., 'aren't you excited about...', 'let's plan our vacation'). By savoring upcoming positive experiences (e.g., a child who loves anticipating and planning for the day she gets to play with her mother), positive feelings can extend beyond the event itself (Quoidbach et al., 2015). Further, increasing PA may improve one's own capacity to successfully cope with stressors. In the Broaden and Build theory, Fredrickson (1998) proposes that positive emotions are functional because they allow people to build resources, such as good

health, coping abilities, and relationships, which enable people to react adaptively to life's stressors. Consistent with broaden and build theory, the ability to foster PA in negative situations or maintain or enhance existing PA is linked to resilience, sustained PA, and well-being (Bryant & Veroff, 2007; Gentzler et al., 2012; Langston, 1994; Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004). Analogous processes have been studied with future negative events where people engage in anticipatory or proactive coping (preparing for stressors before they occur; Aspinwall & Taylor, 1997; Feldman & Hayes, 2005). These may be adaptive (e.g., finding out more information or preparing one's actions) or maladaptive (e.g., stagnant deliberation or outcome fantasy; Feldman & Hayes). Similarly, anticipatory savoring may be adaptive if it extends PA and psychosocial resources, but may be maladaptive if it results in unrealistic expectations or if a positive outcome is very unlikely and it becomes akin to outcome fantasy or wishful thinking.

3.3 | Contextual considerations and the fallacy of uniform efficacy

Another related concern about how we conceptualize and analyze ER with PA is that most studies assess the frequency of ER strategies without attention to contextual factors. Studying savoring and dampening as uniformly adaptive or maladaptive could be an example of the fallacy of uniform efficacy (Bonanno & Burton, 2013) meaning that instead of treating ER strategies as consistently adaptive or maladaptive, we should recognize that ER strategies' adaptiveness may depend on the situation. As one example of contextual effects, young children's PA in response to PA-inducing lab tasks was associated with children having lower self-regulation, but greater PA during parent-child interactions was associated with children having higher self-regulation (Kochanska, Aksan, Penney, & Doobay, 2007). Additionally, dampening PA after a success (e.g., winning a competition) may be adaptive if that person is focusing on ways to improve rather than basking in the victory or if other people in the vicinity did not succeed (English, Lee, John, & Gross, 2017; Gentzler, Palmer, & Ramsey, 2016). Sharing positive events or feelings also may be maladaptive when the other person responds negatively or with low enthusiasm (Fredrick et al., this issue; Gable, Reis, Impett, & Asher, 2004).

3.4 | Expanding measurement tools for PA and its regulation

Future studies could also employ different measurement techniques. In terms of assessing positive ER or its socialization, ecological momentary assessment data and other-report data would be important given that regulatory strategies can be non-conscious or invisible to recipients (e.g., if a parent is getting a child to think more positively about an experience but subtly so that the child does not realize the parent's goal; Bolger, Zuckerman, & Kessler, 2000). Additionally, two studies (Fredrick et al., this issue; Moran et al., this issue) in this issue attempted to measure dampening in a discussion task but were not able to capture this low-occurring PA regulatory behavior. Yet we know dampening occurs because people endorse it on self-report measures. Studies should incorporate more objective (e.g., biological indicators such as fMRI or vagal tone) or less intrusive measures (e.g., recorders that run throughout participants' day; Slatcher & Trentacosta, 2011).

It also would be worthwhile to broaden or narrow the scope of 'positive affect'. For example, although studies in this quartet did not focus on specific positive emotions, parents may differentially socialize particular positive emotions. Consistent with affect valuation theory (Tsai, 2007), parents may promote different emotions (e.g., calm vs. excited) depending on their emotional goals for their child (Gentzler, Palmer, Yi, Root, & Moran, 2018). Finally, although some research has examined PA regulation in conjunction with NA regulation (e.g., Gilbert, Luking, Pagliaccio, Luby, & Barch, 2016; Graf, Ramsey, Patrick, & Gentzler, 2016; Mancini, Luebke, & Bell, 2016), none of the quartet papers did. This approach is essential if parents have generally supportive or unsupportive reactions to children's emotions, in which case the association between socialization of savoring and positive child outcomes could be an artifact of this general parenting approach to both positive and negative emotions. Thus, examining both PA and NA socialization and regulation will provide a more comprehensive understanding of how affect socialization impacts child outcomes.

3.5 | What's the 'right' amount of PA and when?

Another important area of investigation is studying potential upper limits of how much parents should attempt to upregulate their children's PA or how much children should focus on increasing their own PA. People innately desire to feel good, but with age, children can learn to appreciate the importance of not giving in to immediate desires (Lagattuta, 2005). Yet, especially in Western societies, children may have high expectations for wanting to be happy frequently or wanting extreme levels of PA. Indeed, overvaluing happiness is linked to depression and lower well-being in adults (Ford et al., 2015; Mauss, Tamir, Anderson, & Savino, 2011) and youth (Gentzler et al., 2018). Moreover, some research shows the effects of mothers' positive responses to children is non-linear (i.e., mothers' contingent responses is related to sensitivity to a point, after which very high levels of contingency are judged as less sensitive; Bornstein & Manian, 2013).

Parental responses to children's PA are also likely conditional on children's age. Indeed, the ability regulate PA improves with age (Putnam, 2012), and children's PA expressions generally decrease across 4–8 years of age (Sallquist et al., 2009). Cultural display rules for PA and parents' expectations for children and resulting socialization of PA likely also varies. For instance, parents may upregulate peak expressions of PA with their infants and toddlers as this is often viewed as 'cute' in North American culture. However, as children get older, parents may downregulate expressions of peak PA as it may become less appropriate with increased age (Lunkenheimer, Shields, & Cortina, 2007). There is some empirical work on NA socialization to support this conjecture (e.g., parents' supportive responses to NA were linked to less child internalizing for younger children but more internalizing for older children; Mirabile, Oertwig, & Halberstadt, 2016). From the quartet papers, significant associations between children's age and youth PA regulation and maternal socialization were found with 7–12-year-olds (Moran et al., this issue), but the other three articles with adolescent samples did not report associations with age (Fredrick et al., this issue; Nelis et al., this issue; Raval et al., this issue). Research with a wider age range (across childhood and adolescence) may show more developmental changes in youth's PA displays and corresponding patterns of parents' socialization of youth's PA.

Overall, there may be a 'sweet spot' for promoting children's PA. In other words, although parents' desire for their children's happiness is healthy and likely underlies their attempts to increase their child's PA (or to decrease their child's NA), at an extreme level, it could be maladaptive and potentially contribute to indulgent or helicopter parenting (Wilson, 2018). Determining ideal levels of particular PA socialization practices, which are likely non-linear and age- and context-dependent, remain challenging future directions.

3.6 | Individual difference moderators: the role of gender and disposition

Child characteristics, such as child gender, may also be important moderators in these processes. Prior studies have shown that girls dampen more than boys (Gentzler, Ramsey, Yi, Palmer, & Morey, 2014) particularly among adolescents, where 13–14-year-old boys' dampening decreased across two years but girls' increased (Gomez-Baya, Mendoza, Paino, & Gillham, 2017), and girls in ninth (but not seventh or eighth grade) dampened more than boys (Nelis, Bastin, Raes, & Bijttebier, 2018). The tendency for girls to dampen may have downstream effects on their later positive feelings and depression (Gentzler et al., 2014; Gomez-Baya et al., 2017; Nelis et al., 2018). Perhaps these gender differences emerge as a result of gender-differentiated PA socialization, similar to studies examining gender-specific NA socialization and its links to psychopathology (Brand & Klimes-Dougan, 2010). Yet only one study in this quartet (Moran et al., this issue) reported a gender socialization effect where mothers encouraged sons to express PA more than mothers of girls, and no studies examined gender as a moderator. More unobtrusive measures of parent socialization may yield additional findings to determine if parents encourage different type of PA or levels of PA regulation in girls and boys.

Dispositional traits (i.e., temperament) also are associated with PA, which are linked to PA regulation and depression (Gentzler et al., 2014; Harding, Hudson, & Mezulis, 2014; Nelis, Bastin, Raes, Mezulis, & Bijttebier,

2016). Trait PA likely elicits and interacts with socialization processes to predict psychopathology (Putnam, 2012). For example, parents may not need to encourage their child to savor if the child is already high on temperamental positive emotionality, or conversely and in line with this quartet's papers (Moran et al., this issue, Nelis et al., this issue), parents may try more to enhance their child's PA if their child is prone to low PA or depressive symptoms (as denoted in the arrows in Figures 1 and 2 pointing from the child to the parent). Further, differential susceptibility theory (Belsky & Pluess, 2009) and vantage sensitivity theory (Pluess & Belsky, 2013) suggest that certain children will be more susceptible to environmental influences. These theories have received some support with respect to maternal socialization of children's PA socialization mattering more for children's internalizing and externalizing problems for children who are low in self-control (Yi, Gentzler, Ramsey, & Root, 2016).

3.7 | Expanding to peers, neighborhood, and the larger culture

Additionally, given that peers become increasingly important as children age, peer socialization of PA regulation may be an important consideration. In one recent study, co-savoring and co-dampening with friends were associated with depressive symptoms 1 year later, and depressive symptoms also predicted higher subsequent levels co-dampening (Bastin, Nelis, Raes, Vasey, & Bijttebier, 2017). Studies could also examine the interaction between parent and peer socialization of positive ER strategies (e.g., does having a chronically dampening friend moderate the effects of parental encouragement of upregulating strategies?).

Future research also should incorporate broader factors such as culture or socioeconomic status. More research along the lines of Raval and colleagues (this issue) is warranted, especially given findings that upregulating PA may be less encouraged in more collectivistic cultures, such as Japan (Miyamoto & Ma, 2011) or Korea due to concerns about negative impacts on their relationships (Choi, Oishi, Shin, & Suh, 2018). Additionally, Fredrick et al. (this issue) reported that family income was correlated with more adolescent enhancing during the observed discussion, which is interesting in light of findings that people from higher incomes report lower savoring ability and that priming wealth schemas produced less savoring (Quoidbach, Dunn, Petrides, & Mikolajczak, 2010). Thus, further research is needed on when and how culture and affluence may contribute to youth PA regulation.

3.8 | Outcomes besides depression

Finally, although the quartet papers focused on depressive symptoms in youth, other types of psychopathology or problem behaviors (e.g., anxiety, bipolar disorder, externalizing) are related to dysregulated PA (Gentzler et al., 2012; Gruber, 2011; Khazanov & Ruscio, 2016). Additionally, in line with broaden and build (Fredrickson, 1998), upregulating PA can help people develop strengths and flourish. For example, youth who exhibit higher levels of PA are rated higher on social competence (Isley, O'Neil, & Parke, 1999), and parents' relational savoring (i.e., thinking of a best memory with one's child) can promote relationship closeness and satisfaction (Burkhart, Borelli, Rasmussen, & Sbarra, 2015). Moreover, these processes are cyclic wherein PA enhances one's relationships, and one's positive relationships will enhance people's PA (Ramsey & Gentzler, 2015). Therefore, helping youth learn adaptive ways to regulate PA could have immediate and long-term benefits on their lives. Including information on PA regulation in prevention or intervention programs could help parents (and others, such as teachers) offer effective strategies to children. In sum, these quartet articles highlight the importance of continued research on PA to help prevent maladaptive outcomes in youth and promote their well-being.

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