

Toward a holistic view of parents' discourse: Indirect communication as an emotion socialization strategy

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ABSTRACT

Parents teach their children about emotions through a process called emotion socialization and one way that they can do so is through shared discussions about emotions. Research in developmental psychology indicates that parental emotion socialization strategies through discourse such as elaboration and labels and explanations are related to children's emotion understanding and social competence. In the current study, I apply the concept of indirect communication, which has been used in linguistics since the 1970s, to parental emotion socialization with preschool-age children (n= 55; 31 females, 24 males). I define indirect communication as parental speech in which the form and function of a subject-verb phrase do not match and examined relations of parental indirect communication to the previously established strategies in developmental psychology of elaboration and use of labels and explanations. To understand whether this type of communication may influence children's development, I also examined relations of indirect communication to preschoolers' emotion understanding and social competence. Results indicate that parental indirect communication during positive events was related to parental explanations during negative events. Parental indirect communication did not significantly predict children's emotion understanding or social competence, but showed a trend for the association between indirect communication during negative event discussions and children's nonstereotypical emotion understanding. However, the direction for this association was opposite than hypothesized. These results do not suggest consistency of indirect communication across positive and negative event discussions as an emotion socialization strategy.

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### Introduction

It's Jackson's first day of kindergarten. He's a little bit nervous about being away from home for a big part of the day, but he's excited to make new friends.

Jackson is wearing his new Batman shoes that he picked out especially for his first day of school. "Fine, but this is an early birthday present," his mother told him after he begged and pleaded and yelled that he needed them. Early birthday present or not, they lit up when he walked and he was sure that the other children in his class would think they were cool.

Jackson's nerves kept him quiet for the first couple of hours of the day and by snack time no one had complimented his shoes, so he decided to take matters into his own hands. Jackson saw a group of boys sitting together quietly on the same train track-patterned rug that he had in his room at home. Cool, he thought.

Jackson walked over to the whispering group. They were all clustered around one boy who was sniffing, and one boy was gently patting the back of the boy who was sniffing. "Hi!" Jackson yelled, "Wanna see my new shoes?"

"Not really," said the boy who was sniffing. He had red eyes and tear tracks on his cheeks. He had been crying because he missed his mom and wasn't in the mood to talk to Jackson. Not noticing the boy's sadness, Jackson took off his shoes and handed them to another child in the group. "Try them on!" he yelled.

"No, I don't want to," the boy responded. "I like the shoes I have on."

"Just try them on," Jackson said, still yelling and untying the laces on the boy's shoes.

“No!” The boy responded, pulling away his feet and glaring at Jackson. “I don’t want to.”

Jackson said nothing, but reached over and bit the boy in the arm.

Jackson did not successfully enter this peer group because he made a series of poor decisions, each of which illustrates his struggle with school readiness, or the ability to participate in the classroom setting (Carlton & Winsler, 1999). First, he yelled to a group of children that were all sitting together quietly and continued to yell throughout his interaction with them. Failure to monitor volume and tone of voice is an indicator that a child is lacking in social competence. Furthermore, Jackson was not able to identify that one of the boys in the group was sad, even though he was sniffing and had red eyes and tear tracks showing that he had been crying. His failure to identify this boy’s sadness suggests that Jackson has not yet mastered emotion understanding in others. Jackson forced another boy in the group to wear his shoes, even though that boy expressed his disinterest in doing so. Forcing other children to do things that they don’t want to do is also an indicator of a lack in social competence. Lastly, Jackson bit the boy when he did not get what he wanted. Biting and other forms of physical aggression are also signs that a child is lacking in social competence. Taken together, these behaviors illustrate Jackson’s struggle with emotion understanding and social competence, two important pieces of school readiness (Eisenberg, Sadovsky, & Spinrad, 2005).

Children learn about emotions and how to use them appropriately through emotion socialization, especially from their parents (Eisenberg et al., 1998). As such, Jackson’s parents’ emotion socialization likely impacted his emotion understanding and social competence, and in turn his behavior on the first day of kindergarten. The focus of the current study is to expand the literature on parental emotion socialization by applying a concept from linguistics, called *indirect*



*communication* (e.g. Tannen, 2000) to the parental emotion socialization literature. Specifically, I examined how parents' indirect communication relates to established emotion socialization strategies and to children's emotion understanding and social competence, the skills that Jackson struggles with in the opening story. Applying the concept of *indirect communication* from linguistics research adapts a novel perspective in examining parental emotion socialization that has not yet been applied to the field of developmental psychology.

In the following sections, I first discuss the importance of school readiness for children's later outcomes and the role that emotion understanding and social competence play in school readiness. I then discuss parent emotion socialization, with a particular focus on parent-child discourse as a mode of emotion socialization and links of parents' emotion-related discourse with preschool children's emotion understanding and social competence. I conclude by describing the method for data collection, the results, and then by discussing the results and implications for the future.

### **School Readiness**

School readiness is a child's ability to participate in the classroom setting (Carlton & Winsler, 1999). School readiness has long-term consequences for children, as it contributes to elementary school children's educational attainment and later to employment potential in adolescence and young adulthood (Boivin & Bierman, 2014). On the other hand, children who do not acquire school readiness before or during kindergarten are more at risk for learning difficulties during kindergarten and later elementary years as well as an ensuing cycle of academic difficulties (Lunkenheimer, Dishion, Shaw, Connell, Gardner, Wilson, & Skuban, 2008).

Socio-emotional development is a vital component to school readiness for incoming kindergarteners. When children enter kindergarten with the ability to make friends and develop a positive relationship with their teacher, they have better academic success, have a more positive experience, and participate in the classroom more than children who are unsuccessful in these relationships (Denham, 2006). Among the socio-emotional skills that equip children to thrive in the school environment are emotion understanding and social competence.

**Emotion understanding.** Emotion understanding, broadly defined, is expertise in the meaning of emotion (Castro, Cheng, Halberstadt, & Gruhn, 2015). At the preschool age, children are becoming increasingly skilled in emotion understanding and are able to identify and understand emotion expressions and situations that elicit them (Brown & Dunn, 1996; Denham, 1986; Denham, Zoller, & Couchoud, 1994; Hubbard & Coie, 1994). Denham's Affective Knowledge Test (AKT; 1986) is a common measure of preschoolers' emotion understanding. The AKT includes puppet tasks that are designed to assess understanding of both emotion expressions and situations as portrayed in stories. Because this measure has shown ecological validity and requires little verbalization for assessment, it is often used to measure emotion understanding in preschool children (Denham, 2006).

Emotion understanding in preschool and kindergarten children predicts prosocial behavior (Denham, 1986; Ensor, Spencer, & Hughes, 2011; Izard, Fine, Schultz, Mostow, Ackerman, & Youngstrom, 2001; Mostow, Izard, Fine, & Trentacosta, 2002; Roberts & Strayer, 1996) and social competence (Cassidy, Parke, Butkovsky, & Braungart, 1992; Goldman, Corsini, & DeUrioste, 1980; Miller, Gouley, Seifer, Zakriski, Eguia, & Vergnani, 2005; Mostow et al., 2002). Emotion understanding is linked to social competence for preschool and kindergarten children because it is

often immediately relevant to building successful relationships.<sup>1</sup> For example, a child who observes a group of peers and wants to be included in that group has to observe the behavior that will allow him to do so. In the prior story, the group of children were comforting one of the members who was sad. Noticing that the sniffing boy was sad and that other children were attempting to comfort the boy may have allowed Jackson to enter the peer group more effectively (by joining in the attempts to comfort the boy or by drawing attention to his shoes more quietly as a distraction or as a kind offer to help the sad boy cheer up).

To identify behavior that will help the child gain acceptance into the group, the child needs to accurately recognize the emotions of the other peers within that group (Hubbard & Coie, 1994). Emotion understanding is part of the receiving others' affective messages component of Affective Social Competence, a theoretical model that delineates emotional skills needed for successful social interactions (ASC; Halberstadt, Denham, & Dunsmore, 2001). The receiving component of ASC includes awareness of affective messages, identification of the meaning of affective messages, understanding of affective messages within the social context, and managing receiving of affective messages. Jackson illustrates his lack of this component in the opening story. For example, Jackson did not notice the boy's sadness; he either did not see his red eyes or tear tracks and was therefore not aware that an affective message was being transmitted, or he did see them, but did not correctly identify the meaning of this message (he could have interpreted these cues as indicating that the boy was splashed at the water fountain and was happy about it). Furthermore, he either was not aware of another boy's comforting back-patting or did not understand the meaning of this message (he could

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<sup>1</sup> Although a mediational model of emotion understanding and social competence has been shown in the literature, these two variables are of interest as separate outcomes for the current study.

have interpreted this cue as indicating that the boy was playfully rough-housing with the boy and that they were both happy). At the end of the story though, Jackson adjusts his interpretation of the boy's message when he glares at Jackson, to which he responds by biting. Jackson received this last message clearly but needed it to be repeated before this occurred, illustrating his struggle with managing reception of this affective message.

As an important component of affective social competence, emotion understanding plays a key role in school readiness.

**Social competence.** Children who are socially competent possess a set of desirable social skills that allow for success in their social interactions, like sharing or cooperation, and engage in behaviors that reflect successful social functioning, like group participation and engaging in conversation (Rose-Krasnor, 1997). Social competence predicts social acceptance in preschool and kindergarten children (Denham, 2006) and as noted in Raver & Knitzer's (2002) review, also predicts academic performance in the first grade, even after controlling for cognitive skills and previous academic performance. On the other hand, deficits in social competence may put children in a perilous situation. Kindergarten children who are not successful in establishing peer and teacher relationships are more at risk for victimization and externalizing behavior problems in late childhood (Gagnon, Craig, Tremblay, Zhou, & Vitaro, 1995). These problems are likely to persist into the later elementary school years, making children more likely to repeat grades and increasing school adjustment difficulties, as explained by Raver & Knitzer (2002) in their review.

Children who are prepared for the social and emotional demands of a formal learning environment enjoy school more and therefore learn more. On the other hand, children like Jackson

who engage in behaviors indicating a lack of social competence and emotion understanding, such as yelling, physical aggression, ignoring others' wishes, and failing to identify others' emotions, do not adjust as well to this transition.

To succeed in the school environment, children entering kindergarten should possess these abilities (at least to some degree) and have the ability to continue to improve these skills. Parents, who are highly influential figures in children's lives at the preschool age, have a substantial effect on development of emotion understanding and social competence.

### **Parental Emotion Socialization**

Parental emotion socialization is defined as how parents teach their children about emotions (Denham, 1997). During the emotion socialization process, parents teach their children about emotions through their reactions to children's experience and expression of emotions, and through the way they discuss emotions with their children (Eisenberg et al., 1998). The focus of the current study is on how parents of preschoolers teach their children about emotions through discussions of emotion-related events. Parents and children begin to talk about the past as soon as a child learns to talk at all (Eisenberg, 1985), and children are just learning to talk about emotions at the preschool age (Denham et al., 1994). Thus, parent-child conversations about past emotional events are an important method of emotion socialization for preschoolers.

### **Parent-Child Discourse about Emotions**

Previous research on parent-child conversations about past emotional events examines either parental discourse styles or the content of parents' discourse. In the sections below, I discuss each of these in relation to children's emotion understanding and social competence.

**Style analysis of parent-child discourse.** Research on parental styles in parent-child discourse about emotions is customarily focused on elaborative styles versus repetitive styles. Elaboration is a narrative style about past emotional events that involves asking questions, providing descriptive information about the event, and incorporating children's responses into the conversation (Fivush & Fromhoff, 1988). Repetition, on the other hand, is a narrative style that involves repeating previous questions and statements as well as dismissing or ignoring any responses that the parent does not view as correct (Fivush & Fromhoff, 1988). Elaborative parents aim to keep the conversation with their children going, whereas repetitive parents seek certain answers from their children.

An elaborative style can take different forms, focusing either on child-directed questions or on parent-provided pieces of information (Melzi, Schick, & Kennedy, 2011). For example, "*do you remember what we did at the beach?*" is a child-directed question, whereas "*we built sandcastles at the beach*" is a parent-provided piece of information. A questioning elaborative style has shown to be associated with preschool children's ability to provide unique information when discussing unshared events whereas an informational elaborative style is associated with children's ability to provide unique information when discussing shared events (Reese & Brown, 2000). Still, research on parental discourse style usually combines questioning and informational elaboration to form a single index of elaboration style.

Parents with an elaborative discourse style have children who recall more unique information during a conversation about the past, whereas parents with a repetitive discourse style have children who use more placeholders ("yes," "no," "I don't know," or repetitions of information that was already provided) and provide less unique information during a conversation about the past (Lewis, 1999;

Peterson & Roberts, 2003; Reese & Brown, 2000; Sales, Fivush, & Peterson, 2003). Parents' elaborative style also longitudinally predicts children's ability to provide unique information about past events, whether shared or unshared with the parent (Farrant & Reese, 2000; Harley & Reese, 1999; Leichtman, Pillemer, Wang, Koreishi, & Han, 2000; Low & Durkin, 2001).

Parents' elaborative style is also related to preschool children's literacy skills (Reese, 1995) and theory of mind (Reese & Cleveland, 2006). Most pertinent for the proposed study, parental elaborative style is associated with preschool children's emotion understanding (Laible, 2004a; Laible, 2004b; Laible & Song, 2006; van Bergen & Salmon, 2010), and with indices of social competence such as prosocial behavior (Laible, 2004a; Laible & Song, 2006) and social problem-solving skills (Levy et al., 2013).

Parents are more elaborative with daughters than with sons (Flannagan, Baker-Ward, Graham, 1995; Reese & Fivush, 1993; Reese, Haden, & Fivush, 1996) and more elaborative when discussing positive events versus negative events (Fivush, Berlin, Sales, Mennuti-Washburn, & Cassidy, 2003; Melzi & Fernandez, 2004; Wang, 2001; Wang & Fivush, 2005). Cross-cultural research demonstrates that American mothers are more elaborative than Japanese mothers (Minami & McCabe, 1995), but there are mixed findings on American mothers in comparison with Chinese mothers, with some studies supporting greater elaboration by American mothers (Wang, 2001; Wang, 2006; Wang & Fivush, 2005), and another showing no difference in elaboration between American and Chinese mothers (Wang, Leichtman, & Davies, 2000). Because the sample for the proposed research includes only American mothers, culture will not be considered. However, child sex will be covaried and discourse will be measured separately within positive (happy) and negative (upsetting) events.

**Content analysis of parent-child discourse.** Research on the content of conversations about past emotional experiences between parents and children typically focuses on the use of labels and explanations of emotions. Emotion labels refer to parents' direct naming of an emotion, whereas parent explanations link emotion words to information about the cause of the emotion (Cervantes & Callanan, 1998). For example, in the subject-verb phrase "*she was upset*," the parent is labeling the emotional experience of "she" as being "upset." On the other hand, in the phrase "*she was upset because her ice cream fell on the ground*," the parent is linking the emotion state that "she" is experiencing (upset) to the cause of the emotion (her ice cream fell on the ground).

Parents who label emotions more during a conversation about the past have preschool and kindergarten children who use more emotion labels (Bauer, Stark, Lukowski, Rademacher, van Abbema, & Ackil, 2005; Brown & Dunn, 1991; Denham, Cook, & Zoller, 1992) and emotion explanations (Dunn et al., 1991). Parents' use of emotion labels is also associated with preschool children's increased self-knowledge (Welch-Ross, Fasig, & Farrar, 1999), and parents' use of emotion explanations is associated with preschool children's increased self-esteem (Reese, Bird, & Tripp, 2007) and flexibility in coping (Fivush & Sales, 2006). Most pertinent for the proposed study, when parents use more emotion labels, and when parents use more emotion explanations, preschoolers have better emotion understanding (Doan & Wang, 2010; Dunn et al., 1991; Garner et al., 1997; Garner et al., 2008; Martin & Green, 2005). In relation to child social competence, parents' use of emotion labels is related to preschoolers' lower internalizing and externalizing behavior problems (Sales & Fivush, 2005), and parents' use of emotion explanations is related to lower externalizing behavior problems (Sales & Fivush, 2005).



In contrast to elaborative style, parents use more labels and explanations when discussing negative emotions than positive emotions (Fivush, 1991; Lagattuta & Wellman, 2002; Sales & Fivush, 2005). Similar to elaborative style, in regard to child sex, parents use more emotion words (Adams, Kuebli, Boyle, & Fivush, 1995), more explanations of the causes of emotions (Fivush, Brotman, Buckner, & Goodman, 2000), and a greater variety of emotion words with daughters than with sons (Adams, Kuebli, Boyle, & Fivush, 1995; Kuebli, Butler, & Fivush, 1995; but see Denham et al., 1992, who found no significant difference between parent use of labels or explanations with sons compared with daughters). Furthermore, mothers use more emotion explanations than do fathers (Fivush, Brotman, Buckner, & Goodman, 2000) and both mothers and fathers tend to use more labels and explanations in talking with their second-born child than with their first-born (Dunn, Bretherton, & Munn, 1987). For this reason, parent sex and birth order will be controlled for in the analyses if these variables show an association with any outcome variables. When compared to parent-child dyads from other cultures, Caucasian mothers use emotion labels more often than Korean mothers (Mullen & Yi, 1995) as well as more often than Chinese immigrant mothers (Doan & Wang, 2010). Mexican American mothers use labels more frequently than Mexican immigrant mothers, but Mexican immigrant mothers use explanations more frequently than Mexican American mothers (Cervantes, 2002). As noted above, because the sample for the proposed research includes only American mothers, culture will not be considered. However, child sex will be covaried and discourse will be measured separately within positive (happy) and negative (upsetting) events.

**Summary.** To recap, research examining parental styles in conversations with children about emotional events is focused on elaborative versus repetitive styles, whereas research examining

content of parent-child discourse about emotional events is focused on the use of labels and explanations. Both of these strategies explores *what* parents are saying to their children, rather than *how* they are saying it. The current study will take an alternative approach to examining parent-child conversations about emotions by employing discourse analysis, an approach that explores *how* parents use language to communicate with children about emotions.

### **Discourse Analysis**

Analysts of spoken discourse assume that people are skilled users of language and use discourse analysis to understand the structure of conversation in everyday life. Many disciplines employ discourse analysis to accomplish this goal (anthropologists, linguists, philosophers, psychologists, sociologists, and medical and law practitioners), some with the assumption that conversations are a window through which researchers can learn about other aspects of the conversation participant's lives (Cameron, 2001). Many forms of language can be analyzed using discourse analysis (written text, sign language, and graphics or images), but the focus of the current study is on spoken language.

**Discourse analysis in the social sciences.** Social scientists have employed discourse analysis in multiple areas of research such as gender representations (Day, Gough, & McFadden, 2004), child learning (Abdulla, Ghani, Ahmad, & Yahaya, 2015), teacher cognition (Jalilifar, Khazaie, & Kasgari, 2014), team decision-making (Halvorsen & Sarangi, 2015), doctor interactions (Hilligoss, 2014), and speaker-audience interpretation (Merkl-Davies & Koller, 2012), but discourse analysis focusing on parents and children is scarce. Within this area, the most frequent use of discourse analysis appears in literature on children's literacy development (Nichols, 2002; Prins & Toso, 2008). The studies provide

support for a few different categories of discourse in relation to children's emerging literacy as well as for the benefits of parental involvement on children's literacy development. The primary aim of the current study is to expand literature on parental emotion socialization by applying discourse analysis to parent-child conversations about past emotional events.

**Approaches to discourse analysis.** Cameron (2001) identifies five main types of discourse analysis: ethnography of speaking, pragmatics, conversation analysis, critical discourse analysis, and interactional sociolinguistics. These types of discourse analysis are a mixture of big picture approaches (ethnography of speaking and pragmatics), microanalytic, data-centered approaches (conversation analysis and interactional sociolinguistics), and a combination of both (critical discourse analysis). The current study will examine pragmatic theories by using a discourse analytic method.

Pragmatics is focused on how language is used to accomplish tasks in real-world situations (Cameron, 2001). The work of three pragmatic theorists—Grice (1975), Austin (1975), and Searle (1976)—are commonly used by many discourse analysts. These ordinary language philosophers theorize about how conversations occur, each focusing on different but interrelated aspects of communication. The work of these theorists provides the foundation for the construct of indirect communication in the current study. Specifically, Grice's (1975) explanation of the cooperative principle, Austin's (1975) identification of speech acts, and Searle's (1976) further classification of speech act will be used in the current study to operationalize parental indirect communication.

**Grice's work on indirectness: Conversational maxims.** Grice (1975) proposed the cooperative principle, which assumes that speakers will cooperate with their interlocutor to ensure that interaction goes smoothly and that each person can make sense of the other person's contributions.

This cooperative principle is defined in terms of four maxims: quantity (contribute as much information as necessary), quality (do not say what is false or there is not adequate evidence to support), relation (contribute relevant information), and manner (avoid obscurity and ambiguity). When speakers flout (or violate) any of these maxims, researchers applying a pragmatic approach to discourse analysis assume that speakers do so because the risk of following the maxims is greater than the risk involved in flouting them. Therefore, this deviance is treated as meaningful. For example, consider the following example in which the second speaker (Amos) is flouting one of Grice's maxims.

John: Scott was being so annoying yesterday, am I right?

Amos: Oh yeah, the weather is nice today for this time of year.

In this conversation snippet, Amos is violating the maxim of relation. His contribution to the conversation does not seem to make sense in relation to John's prior comment. To understand Amos's contribution, John has to infer the meaning since it is not directly apparent. To make this inference, John has to have some knowledge about the context of the conversation. If the object of the conversation, Scott, was walking toward this dyad, then John can infer that Amos is saying that this was not an appropriate topic of conversation since Scott could hear. If Scott was not within earshot but John knew that Amos and Scott were good friends, then perhaps John can infer that Amos is saying he does not want to talk negatively about Scott because of their close relationship.

Both in this example and in natural conversation, the hearer is cued to look for relevant inferences whenever a speaker flouts one of Grice's maxims. These inferences are dependent on the context and background information that are available to the speaker at the time of the inference. In the prior example, the knowledge that Scott was within earshot allowed for the inference that Amos meant that they should change the subject since the object of their conversation was close enough to hear. If John had the background knowledge that Amos and Scott were really close friends, then this piece of knowledge allows for the inference that Amos just does not want to speak negatively of Scott.

Grice's (1975) cooperative principle assumes that speakers will be cooperative with one another, but when they deviate from doing so, they are doing so for a certain reason. When speakers flout any maxim, hearers have to engage in inference to understand the speaker's contribution. As shown in the prior example, the background knowledge that the hearer has is an important factor in the inferences that this person can make.

In the current study I used Grice's maxims as a conceptual foundation for identifying parents' speech where flouting maxims might make parents' meaning obscure or ambiguous to the child. To concretely operationalize this *indirect communication*, I turned to Austin (1975) and Searle (1976).

**Austin's work on indirectness: Locution, illocution, and perlocution.** Austin (1975) identified a class of utterances called speech acts, with the underlying theory being that when people say something, they are also doing something. There are three parts to a speech act: the locution (actual utterance a speaker utters), illocution (force of the utterance, how the utterance is intended to be interpreted), and perlocution (effect on the hearer). Most research on parent-child discourse and socio-emotional development examines the locution part of parent's speech acts; both parental elaboration as

well as the use of labels and explanations involve examination of the words that parents speak to their children without consideration of the illocution, or how the words are intended to be interpreted. The current study will consider the illocution portion of parents' speech acts by comparing illocutions to the locutions and identifying mismatches between the two. Consider the following example in which the second speaker's (Richard's) locution is not concordant with the illocution.

Jim: How are you?

Richard: Lovely, running on only half an hour of sleep.

The locution of Richard's contribution is that he is doing well and has had half an hour of sleep. The illocution, or force of this contribution, suggests that this is not the case. Half an hour of sleep is very little and it is difficult to believe that any person would be lovely in this situation. So in this example, the illocution does not match the locution.

I considered the match or mismatch between the locution and the illocution in the current study and by exploring relations of indirect communication with emotion understanding and social competence, I made inferences about the perlocution of these subject-verb phrases—that is, their effect on the child.

**Searle's work on indirectness: Form and function.** Searle (1976) identified five types of illocutionary acts: representatives (utterances that can be true or false), directives (utterances in which the speaker attempts to get the listener to do something), commissives (utterances that commit the

speaker to some future act), expressives (expressions of thoughts or opinions), and declarations (utterances that change the state of something). Searle was dissatisfied with Austin's earlier attempts at illocutionary classification, most notably because of ambiguity and inconsistency among the categories Austin identified. Both theorists discuss speech acts and differentiate between the content of the utterance (locution) and the force of it (illocution), but categorize illocutionary acts in different ways.

I used Searle's (1976) illocutionary classification scheme as the foundation of my coding scheme for indirect communication in the current study. In examining the illocution portion of parents' speech, the form and function of each subject-verb phrase were classified in terms of Searle's (1976) categories. Subject-verb phrases in which the form and function are a mismatch were considered indirect. Consider the following example in which the form and function of contribution of the second speaker (Jacob) are a mismatch.

Elliot: Anything else you need me to do?

Jacob: Well they want us to have the equipment set up.

In this example, Jacob's contribution is in the form of a representative, a statement that is either true or false. This contribution is in the form of a fact, that whoever "they" is wants the equipment set up. However, this contribution functions as a directive in that Jacob is attempting to get Elliot to help set up the equipment, since that is what has been asked of him. Jacob's contribution is considered indirect because the form (representative) does not match the function (directive).

**Indirect communication as an emotion socialization strategy.** I define *indirect communication* as any way that parents discuss an emotional event in which the form and function of a subject-verb phrase are a mismatch. This operationalization of indirectness utilized Searle's (1976) categories of illocution to understand parental speech in terms of Austin's (1976) broader categories of speech acts, locution and illocution. Though the operationalization of indirectness in the current study is most directly derived from Austin's (1975) and Searle's (1976) theories on illocutionary acts, Grice (1975) provides an important component of the conceptualization of indirect communication. When parents engage in communication in which the form of a subject-verb phrase does not match the function and thus the locution is not concordant with the illocution, extra interpretational steps must be taken to derive the intent of the speaker (Grice, 1975). Moreover, when parents flout any of Grice's (1975) maxims and communicate indirectly, they are doing so for a reason. Thus, my conceptualization of *indirect communication* draws on well-established theoretical work by three linguists.

As an example from the data for this study, a parent asking “*you opened some, just some?*” in talking about how many presents a child received for Christmas is indirect because the form of this subject-verb phrase is a question, but it functions as a representative in that this statement is false; the parent is indicating that the child opened many presents on Christmas day. As another example, a parent saying “*okay, I will tell myself*” in trying to get a child that is silent to talk about an emotional event is indirect because the form of the phrase is an expressive but functions as a directive in attempting to get the child to engage in the conversation. See Appendix D for a summary of possible



forms and functions of phrases, and see Table 1 for a summary of parent discourse constructs—elaboration, labels and explanations, and indirect communication.

There are various functions that indirectness can serve in adult conversations. Lakoff (1975) identified two functions of indirectness: defensiveness and rapport. Communicating indirectly allows a speaker to defend him or herself by disclaiming or modifying what was said if it is not received well by the hearer. Communicating indirectly may also lead both the speaker and hearer to feel greater rapport because it lends the appearance that the speaker got what they wanted because the hearer wanted the same thing, rather than as a result of a direct demanding. Both of these functions of indirectness are framed as benefits in that this type of communication can help the dyad avoid confrontation, save face, and continue the interaction smoothly.

Relatedly, Brown and Levinson (1987) define politeness in terms of face-threatening acts. “Face” is the self-image that a person wants to claim and acts that threaten someone else’s self-image are called face-threatening acts. Brown and Levinson (1987) posit that when a person engages in a face-threatening act, they are faced with the choice of: (1) doing so without redressive action or “baldly,” (2) doing so with redressive action and engaging in positive politeness, and (3) doing so with redressive action and engaging in negative politeness. Thus, the first choice a person faces in engaging in a face-threatening act is to do so baldly or with redressive action; if the person chooses redressive action then the next choice is to do so with positive or negative politeness. Engaging in a face-threatening act baldly and without redressive action is the most direct, unambiguous, and concise possibility. Thus, this choice does not involve politeness. An example of engaging in a face-threatening act baldly would be to say “that is really annoying, stop doing that.” This face-threatening

act is direct, unambiguous, and does not involve redressive action. The latter two options are less direct, as they involve redressive action and either positive or negative politeness. Brown and Levinson (1987) explain that redressive actions attempt to counteract the potential damage of the face-threatening act by modifying or lessening its impact. Positive politeness is approach-based and involves indicating to the other person that they both want the same things, whereas negative politeness is avoidance-based and involves minimizing imposition on the other person. An example of positive politeness is establishing common ground or displaying interest in the conversation, whereas an example of negative politeness is not interrupting and giving deference. Whether positive or negative politeness is used, redressive actions involve indirect communication because of the mitigation that acts to lessen the potential damage of the face-threatening act. Thus, Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness framework indicates that the decision to communicate with another person indirectly may be a strategy for engaging in face-threatening acts that makes them less threatening. In the context of the parent-child relationship, this might function both to preserve the quality of the relationship (i.e., maintain rapport) and to manage parents' and children's emotional arousal.

Tannen (2000) suggests that an additional function of indirect communication may be to express power. There is a common assumption that asking people to do things rather than telling them exemplifies insecurity and powerlessness (Tannen, 2000). Although this may be true in some cases, Tannen (2000) explains that, within the work setting, speakers frequently need listeners to do something for them. Hearers who expect politeness may be offended by directness. Thus, indirect communication can avoid offending the hearer which will increase the likelihood of the hearer

engaging in the behavior that the speaker needs to be done. Yet, because the speaker's goals are accomplished, the speaker's power is intact; indirect communication may be one way in which people in power ensure this outcome. The power function is enmeshed with the politeness function in that engaging in direct communication can be seen as offensive, whereas engaging in indirect communication is seen as polite. So, communicating indirectly yields a better chance for the desired result if direct communication might offend the hearer. Not all people in power communicate indirectly; Tannen (2000) posits that indirectness is the choice of those in power and therefore no generalizations can be made about use of indirectness in relation to power. Parent-child relationships inherently involve a power difference (Hoffman, 1975). Therefore, parents will have a choice of whether or not to use indirect communication with their children.

Although indirectness is sometimes described as a strategy or a decision that a person makes during interaction, Brown and Levinson (1987) explain that some forms of indirectness are conventionalized. That is, certain forms of indirectness are so common that they are seen as the *normal* method of communicating rather than a decision to communicate in a different or marked way. For example, "Can you close the window?" would be interpreted as a request equivalent to "Please close the window" rather than a question about the listener's capability to close the window. Because conventionalized forms of indirectness are common, there is little room for an alternative interpretation. Thus, although indirectness is described as a strategy or a decision in linguistics research and is examined in the current study as a parental socialization strategy, indirectness may not always be a choice but rather a communicative style that parents are not aware of using.

In addition to functioning to preserve rapport in the parent-child relationship and manage emotional arousal, indirectness during parent-child conversations may also function to teach children cultural norms. Hymes (1972) explained that a competent language-user needs to understand language beyond the grammar system; a competent language-user needs to understand how to use language in a way that is appropriate for the context. He termed this knowledge “communicative competence.” “Communicative competence” is exemplified by producing the appropriate type of utterances at the appropriate times. Each community will have different “norms” for what type of language is appropriate for certain contexts and as a result, ethnography of speaking was developed and is now used as a way of examining rules of language-use within a certain community. When parents communicate indirectly with children, they may be teaching them communicative competence (Hymes, 1972). Parents’ varying use of direct and indirect communication across contexts may shape children’s understanding of how language works within their culture.

In regard to children’s socio-emotional development, there are several functions parent-child indirect communication about emotional events may serve. By mitigating face-threatening acts, indirectness may make the conversation about the past less stressful for the child and help the parent-child dyad avoid confrontation (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994), as conflict between a caregiver and child may result in emotional insecurity (Eisenberg, Fabes, & Murphy, 1996). For example, discussing a previous punishment could cause the child to become angry at the parent for punishing him or her. Direct communication about this may cause an argument, whereas communicating indirectly could avoid this confrontation and resulting insecurity. This function of indirectness in parent-child conversations about emotion is similar to the politeness function of indirectness in adult conversations

(Brown & Levinson, 1987). This function is also similar to the rapport function of indirectness that Lakoff (1975) identifies in that communicating indirectly can produce a result because the dyad wants the same thing, rather than because one member of the dyad demanded it. This also helps the parent-child dyad avoid confrontation and can make the conversation about the past less stressful for the child if the child perceives that he/she wants the same things within the conversation that the parent does.

Communicating indirectly may also help the child avoid emotional overarousal, which allows for the development of emotion regulation in future emotional events (Eisenberg et al., 1996). Similar to the defensiveness function that Lakoff (1975) describes, a parent may monitor how the child is receiving a difficult conversation to modify communication if the child becomes overwhelmed. For example, when talking about a funeral, if the child starts to tear up the parent may choose to use euphemisms rather than more direct language to help the child manage his or her experience of sadness. Lastly, because indirect communication is not always conventionalized, alternative interpretations of parents' speech may be possible. This requires cognitive unpacking on the part of the child, which makes discussion of the event more salient and may ultimately lead to deeper processing of the emotion talk (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994). For example, communicating indirectly about how much money a child received for his birthday may lead the child to rethink their previous answer and thus make the conversation about their birthday more salient.

As a result of the multiple functions indirectness may serve in parent-child conversations about emotions, I expected that children whose parents use more indirect communication may have an advantage in their socio-emotional development. These children will have practiced cognitive unpacking in their interactions with their parents and may have more skill at decoding emotion-related

messages from their peers and teachers. Furthermore, they may have better developed emotion regulation skills, which may assist in socially competent behavior.

Because research on indirectness in parent-child conversations about emotions is sparse, the aim of this study is to identify indirect communication in parent-child conversations about emotions, and to test links of indirect communication with socio-emotional outcomes. Research indicates that children have the pragmatic competence to understand indirect speech acts at around the age of three years (Bucciarelli, Colle, & Bara, 2003; Reeder, 1980; Shatz, 1978). This literature supports the notion that preschool-aged children have the ability to engage in the inference that Grice (1975) posits is important to understand a speaker when he/she flouts any of the maxims that comprise the cooperative principle. Moreover, Gopnik's studies on cognitive development support benefits of indirect reasoning in preschool and kindergarten children for drawing causal inferences (Gopnik, Sobel, Schulz, & Glymour, 2001; Kushnir, Gopnik, Lucas, & Schulz, 2010; Seiver, Gopnik & Goodman, 2013; Sobel, Tenenbaum, & Gopnik, 2004). These studies involve "blicket detectors," machines that light up and play music when certain objects are placed on them. Children in these studies observed patterns of contingency between objects and activation of the blicket detector, forcing them to use indirect evidence to infer a causal relationship between blickets and the blicket detector. The ability to recognize a causal relationship (namely, that the blicket activates the blicket detector) without direct evidence supporting it allows children to *infer* this relationship. This process may also happen in parent-child discourse, as suggested by Grice's (1975) work on the cooperative principle and the inference that a listener has to engage in when a speaker flouts any one of Grice's (1975) maxims.

In addition to Grice (1975), research in psychology has also indicated that inference is an important component of interpreting indirectness. Ackerman (1983) builds off of Grice's work and suggests that there are two parts of this process: detection and inference. Detection requires the listener to identify when the speaker does not mean exactly what he said, whereas inference requires the listener to hypothesize about what the speaker *actually* means. This study will focus on the context of indirectness to identify indirect communication in parent-child discourse, but will not examine children's detection or inference of these occurrences.

### **The Current Study**

The overall goal of the current study is to provide a more holistic view of parental emotion socialization during parent-child discourse by examining indirect communication, a concept adapted from linguistics research that focuses on *how* parents communicate rather than *what* they communicate during parent-child conversations about emotion-related events. Specifically, indirect communication is defined as parental speech in which the form of a subject-verb phrase does not match the function, based on Searle's (1976) theoretical framework identifying types of illocutionary acts. There are two specific aims in this study. The first is to examine whether indirect communication is associated with other common measures of parent emotion socialization during parent-child discourse, specifically elaboration and use of labels and explanations. In other words, parents' use of indirect communication were examined in relation to elaboration and use of labels and explanations. These measures were examined separately by positive and negative events were tested for differences when parents are talking with daughters and sons, because event valence and child sex differences are seen in the

literature on elaboration and use of labels and explanations. The second aim of this study is to test whether indirect communication accounts for additional variance (beyond parent elaboration and use of labels/explanations) in children's emotion understanding and social competence, measured through a standard age-appropriate task and teacher questionnaire, respectively.

Hypotheses were as follows:

H1A. Parents who employ more indirect communication will use more elaboration.

- i. Indirect communication will be more strongly related to elaboration within positive events compared with negative events.
- ii. Indirect communication will be more strongly related to elaboration for parents talking with daughters compared with those talking with sons.

H1B. Parents who employ more indirect communication will use more labels and explanations.

- i. Indirect communication will be more strongly related to labels and explanations within negative events compared with positive events.
- ii. Indirect communication will be more strongly related to labels and explanations for parents talking with daughters compared with those talking with sons.

H2. After accounting for effects of elaboration and parents' use of emotion labels and emotion explanations, parents who employ indirect communication will have children with better emotion understanding and social competence.

Research in developmental psychology indicates that elaboration occurs more during positive than negative event discussions (Fivush, Berlin, Sales, Mennuti-Washburn, & Cassidy, 2003; Melzi &



Fernandez, 2004; Wang, 2001; Wang & Fivush, 2005) and occurs more with daughters than with sons (Flannagan, Baker-Ward, Graham, 1995; Reese & Fivush, 1993; Reese, Haden, & Fivush, 1996). Moreover, research in developmental psychology indicates that labels/explanations occur more during negative than positive event discussions (Fivush, 1991; Lagattuta & Wellman, 2002; Sales & Fivush, 2005) and occur more with daughters than with sons (Adams, Kuebli, Boyle, & Fivush, 1995; Fivush, Brotman, Buckner, & Goodman, 2000; Kuebli, Butler, & Fivush, 1995). I expected that overall, parents who use more indirectness will also use more elaboration and labels/explanations, because in the parent-child relationship parents have the power to choose whether to communicate directly or indirectly and can adapt their communication style to meet their socialization goals. Moreover, because communicative competence involves contextual sensitivity, I expected that relations of indirect communication with elaboration and labels/explanations would be stronger in the communicative contexts that more strongly elicit elaboration and labels/explanations in parent-child conversations about past emotional events. Thus, I hypothesized that indirectness would more strongly relate to parental elaboration in the contexts in which elaboration more strongly occurs (during positive event discussions and with daughters). I also hypothesized that indirectness would more strongly relate to parental use of labels/explanations in the contexts in which labels/explanations more strongly occur (during negative event discussions and with daughters).

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Data collection took part as part of a larger, cross-cultural study in the Social Development Lab. Fifty-five parent-child dyads (children ages 4 – 5 years, 31 females and 24 males) participated in the U.S. sample, which was the focus of the current study. See Table 2 and Table 3 for more demographic information. Letters were sent out to past participants who indicated that they were interested in future studies. Families were recruited from preschools and childcare centers in the Blacksburg, Christiansburg, and Radford areas. Electronic ads were also placed on local websites and listservs. Parents were compensated for their participation with \$15 and the children received a small toy. Children’s preschool teachers were also sent questionnaires; once they sent the survey back, teachers were compensated with a \$5 gift card.

## **Materials**

**Family Information Sheet.** This is a demographic questionnaire that was used to gather information about the participants in this study such as income, ethnicity, education, and age. See Appendix A.

**Social Competence and Behavior Form (LaFreniere & Dumas, 1996).** This is a 30-item questionnaire that was sent to the child’s preschool teacher or another adult who had seen the child interact with other children around the same age. Past research shows that this measure displays satisfactory internal consistency ( $\alpha = .80$  to  $.92$ ) as well as construct validity when compared to a behavior problem measure as well as the longer 80-item version of this measure (LaFreniere, Dumas, Capuano, & Dubeau, 1992). The internal consistency of this scale for the current sample was lower than displayed in the literature ( $\alpha = .574$ ).

**Parent Questionnaire for the Affective Knowledge Test (Denham, 1986).** This is a 12-item questionnaire designed to measure how children would react in certain situations that yield more than one possible emotion. This completed questionnaire was used by the researcher working with the child to act out the opposite emotion that the child would feel for the Affective Knowledge Test (described below). For each situation, two choices of emotions were listed and parents were instructed to choose the emotion that their child would most likely feel in the situation described.

**Affective Knowledge Test (Denham, 1986).** This task is designed to measure emotion understanding and involves the child identifying emotions (happy, sad, mad, scared) on stick puppets' faces as well as identifying emotions (happy, sad, mad, scared) on sock puppets in vignettes that were acted out by the researcher. There are two subscales for the stick puppet portion of the emotion understanding task— expressive and receptive. The expressive subscale involves the child identifying how each stick puppet feels; the receptive subscale involves the child identifying which of the four puppets feels the emotion that the researcher asks the child to identify. For the sock puppet portion of the emotion understanding task, there were two types of vignettes—stereotypical and nonstereotypical. Stereotypical vignettes involve situations that generally yield the same emotion for everyone and nonstereotypical vignettes involve situations that can yield a couple of different emotions in children. For example, a stereotypical vignette involved a child showing happiness at receiving ice cream (an emotion that almost all children will feel in response to the situation), whereas a nonstereotypical vignette involved going to preschool (which might cause a child to feel either happy or sad). For nonstereotypical vignettes, the researcher acted out the opposite emotion that the parent claimed the

child would feel, as indicated by the Parent Questionnaire for the Affective Knowledge Test (described above).

A score of 2 was given to every child for each correct response, a 1 was given for an incorrect response but correct valence of an emotion (for example, the correct response is sad but a child responds with “mad”), and a 0 was given for an incorrect response and incorrect valence. Total scores for each subscale were calculated by summing the number of points for each child for each subscale. There were 4 items on the expressive subscale, 4 items on the receptive subscale, 8 items on the stereotypical situations subscale, and 12 items on the non-stereotypical situations subscale; thus, the maximum score for the expressive and receptive subscales was 8, the maximum score for the stereotypical subscale was 16, and the maximum score for the nonstereotypical subscale was 24.

Past research shows that this measure displays satisfactory internal consistency ( $\alpha = .76$  to  $.89$ ) as well as construct validity when compared to teacher and peer reports (Denham et al., 2012). The internal consistency of this scale overall for the current sample was consistent with past research ( $\alpha = .824$ ). Internal consistency for the subscales is as follows: ( $\alpha = .260$  for expressive,  $\alpha = .547$  for receptive,  $\alpha = .528$  for stereotypical, and  $\alpha = .822$  for nonstereotypical).

## **Procedure**

Two trained female research assistants (from a pool of 6) either visited the family in their home or worked with the family in the Virginia Tech Social Development lab, whichever the family indicated as their preference. One of the research assistants administered the informed consent to the parent while the other research assistant played with the child in another room that was out of hearing range. After the informed consent (see Appendix B), the parent filled out the Parent Questionnaire for

the Affective Knowledge Test (Denham, 1986). Then, the research assistant helped the parent choose events for the discourse task (described below). Once the Parent Questionnaire for the Affective Knowledge Test (Denham, 1986) was completed and the events were chosen, the research assistant and the parent joined the other research assistant and the child in the other room to begin the discourse task.

Child assent (see Appendix C) was administered before the discourse task and all tasks were video recorded for later transcription and coding. For the discourse task, parents were asked to pick two events—one that made the child happy and one that made the child upset. It was emphasized that events should be recent, occurring within the past few months, so that the events were salient to the child. Parents were asked not to choose events that had their own script, such as a movie or a birthday party. Dyads sat next to each other on a couch and were given 2.5 minutes to discuss each event. Dyads were asked to discuss the events as they normally would and to pretend the researchers were not in the room. Order of events (happy, upset) was counterbalanced.

After the discourse task, a research assistant left the room with the parent to begin other questionnaires for the larger study while the other research assistant administered the Affective Knowledge Test (Denham, 1986). Two emotion regulation tasks were then completed for the larger study.

After all of the tasks with the child were finished, both researchers returned to the room with the parent to finish the last bit of paperwork. Parents were asked to provide contact information to the child's preschool teacher or other adult to send the Social Competence and Behavior Form (LaFreniere & Dumas, 1996). At the end of the session, parents were given a \$15 gift card and thanked for their

participation. Children had been given a small toy as part of an emotion regulation task for the larger study. Sessions lasted about an hour for each parent-child dyad.

## **Coding**

Parent-child conversations were transcribed verbatim for later coding. Three types of coding were completed, as described below.

**Elaborative style.** These transcripts were coded using Fivush and Fromhoff's (1988) elaboration coding scheme. In this coding scheme, parental speech is broken down into subject-verb phrases. These units are composed of a subject and a verb ("We went to the movies and we ate popcorn" would be 2 subject-verb phrases, whereas "We went to the movies and ate popcorn" would be 1 subject-verb phrase and any phrase that cannot stand alone (ex: "yeah yesterday") is grouped with the subject-verb phrase that follows it (ex: "We went to the movies, yeah yesterday, and we ate popcorn" would be 2 subject-verb phrases, "We went to the movies" and "yeah yesterday, and we ate popcorn"). If an entire sentence (as denoted by a period) cannot stand alone, it is still considered one subject-verb phrase. Specific rules for breaking down the conversations into these units are noted in the elaboration coding scheme.

Once the transcripts were appropriately broken down, each subject-verb phrase was coded into one of seven mutually exclusive categories (elaboration, repetition, remember prompt, confirmation, negation, associative talk, and off topic). Elaboration, the most pertinent code for this study, was coded for any subject-verb phrase in which the parent provides information into the conversation or requests new information from the child. Each subject-verb phrase could only be coded with one of the seven possible codes, meaning that one subject-verb phrase cannot be counted as multiple codes.

All of the transcripts were coded and checked for interrater reliability; the overall Kappa was .78. As a satisfactory Kappa is considered .6 (McHugh, 2012), interrater reliability for the elaboration coding scheme was sufficient. Instead of counting raw frequency of elaborative subject-verb phrases, each parent was given a total elaborative score for each event that was calculated by dividing the raw frequency of elaborative subject-verb phrase over the total number of subject-verb phrases for the event. This allowed for an easier comparison of parental elaboration across parents as well as controlled for parental verbosity; using proportions rather than raw frequencies did not give parents who spoke more an advantage in obtaining a higher elaborative score.

**Labels and explanations.** Transcripts were also coded using Cervantes and Callanan's (1998) scheme to identify emotion labels and explanations. Coding units for this scheme are typically parent conversation turns, but were adapted for this study to be parental subject-verb phrases in order to keep the measurement unit consistent across the 3 different coding schemes that were utilized in this study. Each parental subject-verb phrase was coded as either no mention of an emotion, labeling of an emotion (naming the emotion), or explanation of an emotion. Subject-verb phrases coded as an explanation of an emotion were either mentions of the cause of an emotion, the result of an emotion, a mention of an intervention related to an emotion (an action that solves a problem an emotion caused or offers a distraction), or an elicitation (requesting an explanation of an emotion). All subject-verb phrases were coded with only one code as this coding scheme is also mutually exclusive.

19 out of the 54 transcripts checked for interrater reliability and the overall Kappa was sufficient ( $K = .82$ ). Like with the elaborative score calculations, parents' use of labels and explanations

for positive and negative events were calculated as a proportion of total subject-verb phrases for the event to control for parental verbosity.

**Indirect communication.** Finally, the transcripts were coded qualitatively to systematically and identify instances of indirect communication from examining the locution and the illocution of parents' speech. The coding scheme to identify indirect communication for this study was adapted from Searle (1976); the five types of illocutionary acts identified in this paper (representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations) were retained in this study but two more were added (questions and redressed questions). The questions category was added because the nature of this task yielded many questions from parents, both about the events under discussion and questions in general. Searle's (1976) theoretical categorization of illocutionary acts did not provide a category that these questions would fit under, likely because the conceptualization of a conversation in this paper is natural and between adults, whereas the conversations in this study were mostly parent-elicited and resulted from instructions to discuss specific events. Adding these categories was a strength in that it allowed for a more accurate depiction of the data that resulted from this task, but is a limitation in that these categories will not likely generalize to "natural" conversations between parents and children outside of the laboratory.

Each subject-verb phrase (defined as such using the rules from the elaborative coding scheme) was coded for the form as well as the function of the subject-verb phrase. Any subject-verb phrase in which the form and the function did not match was considered indirect. For example, "Can you sit down please?" functions as a directive in that the parent is attempting to get the child to sit, but in the form of a redressed question. Thus, the form of the phrase (redressed question) does not match the



function (directive) and it is therefore considered indirect. As another example from the data, a parent saying “I can’t talk to you anymore until you sit,” functions as a directive in that the parent is attempting to get the child to sit, but is in the form of a commissive in committing the parent to the future act of not speaking to the child. Thus, the form of this phrase (commissive) does not match the function (directive) and it is therefore considered indirect. It is interesting to note that both of these subject-verb phrases in the prior examples function as directives in attempting to get the child to sit, but do so in different ways. In one example, the parent asks the child to please sit and in the other example, the parent commits herself to a future action in not being able to talk to the child unless he is sitting. Both of these parental contributions yielded the same result in that the child sat down, but were accomplished in different ways. The same result was yielded in this corpus by parents directly telling children to sit (“sit down”). Thus, the result of these contributions was all the same, but the delivery of the message varied. In some instances, the delivery was direct, but in others, it was indirect. Even within the indirect contributions, parents communicated indirectly in different ways with different mismatches of form and function of subject-verb phrases.

Further definitions of each type of illocutionary act and examples can be found in the illocution coding scheme in Appendix D.

Once certain types of subject-verb phrases were noted as frequently occurring (for example, expressives in the form of representatives), special rules were written and recorded in the coding scheme. This made the coding systematic in that all subject-verb phrases of a certain type were coded in the same way, following the predefined special rules.

However, as is common in qualitative analysis, only one coder was used and no consensus was obtained. While interrater reliability is an important component of quantitative research, the concept of reliability in qualitative research is not equivalent. Instead, the paradigm for “reliability” in qualitative research includes credibility, confirmability, consistency, and applicability/transferability (Golafshani, 2003). Though this coding was completed by only one coder, the scheme is credible because it was based off of an established illocution categorization scheme (Searle, 1976) and is confirmable as well as consistent as a coding scheme was documented and decisions for classifying indirectness were recorded and systematically followed. Moreover, the coding demonstrated applicability/transferability as each code was defined, explained, and examples were given to allow for future coders to apply this scheme to conversation data. Adapting a more quantitative approach in this case would not have allowed the in-depth exploration of indirect communication as the qualitative approach did, which was necessary at this step as this is a new construct that has not yet been examined. However, adapting a more quantitative approach in the future would allow for a more objective process and thus more generalizable results.

The coding scheme I developed for this study was adapted from a theoretical categorization scheme (Searle, 1976). This has the strength of innovation and conceptual consistency, yet has the limitation of not being able to assess convergent validity because of the novelty of this way of categorizing actual subject-verb phrases.

## **Results**

### ***Preliminary Analyses***

**Variable distributions.** The mean and range of the outcome variables was examined first for evidence of ceiling or floor effects. Each subscale of children’s emotion understanding scores was

examined, as well as the total emotion understanding composite score, in addition to children's social competence score. Please see Table 4 for descriptive statistics. Two of the emotion understanding subscales, expressive and receptive scores, did not show variability between the participants as the mean for each was close to the maximum possible score of 8. Examination of the frequency of scores for each of these subscales showed that 35% of children had the highest possible score for the expressive subscale, and 87% had the highest possible score for the receptive subscale. Because these two subscales showed ceiling effects, they were not used for analyses. None of the other scales showed evidence of ceiling or floor effects.

Histograms were then examined to determine whether outliers might be present that would disproportionately influence results. Stereotypical emotion knowledge scores ranged from 7-16 and nonstereotypical scores ranged from 5-24. Histograms revealed that the same participant received a score of 7 for the stereotypical subscale and a score of 5 for the nonstereotypical subscale. These scores were more than 3 standard deviations below the mean for each subscale. I note that this participant scored near the mean for the expressive subscale (score= 7, mean= 7.18) and for the receptive subscale (score= 9, mean= 7.75) as well as for social competence (score of 43, mean= 42.49). The session for this participant was re-examined to see if there was evidence of an administration or other factor such as distraction that might have influenced the child's score. During the administration of the emotion understanding task for these two subscales, a toddler appeared to distract both the child and the experimenter. Thus, these low scores for the stereotypical and nonstereotypical subscales may not reflect the child's emotion understanding. These two scores were winsorized, a procedure that makes an outlying score less extreme by replacing it with the next highest score in the sample, which becomes the new minimum score (Tukey, 1977). Winsorization is recommended to retain participants

without unduly influencing analyses with outliers (Ghosh & Vogt, 2012). Descriptive statistics for the stereotypical and nonstereotypical subscales before and after winsorization are presented in Table 4.

Finally, skewness and kurtosis statistics were examined for all variables to determine normality of their distributions. Parent labels during discussion of positive and negative events as well as parent explanations during discussion of positive events were not normally distributed, showing high skew and/or kurtosis based on the cutoffs provided by Kim (2013). However, the other 5 variables that were calculated using the same discourse task showed normal skewness and kurtosis values. Since only 3 were not normally distributed and 5 were, none of these variables were transformed to preserve interpretability across discourse variables. Stereotypical scores, nonstereotypical scores, and social competence scores were normally distributed and thus were also not transformed.

**Demographic covariates.** Correlations between child age in months and all study variables were calculated. These correlations are shown in Table 5 and separated by child gender in Table 6. For girls, child age was associated with parental indirect communication during negative events ( $r(49) = .435, p = .021$ ). This means that parents used more indirect communication during negative events with girls when they were older. There was also an association between child age and nonstereotypical emotion knowledge scores ( $r(53) = .267, p = .049$ ). This means that older children were higher on nonstereotypical emotion knowledge. Because nonstereotypical emotion knowledge is an outcome variable, child age was included in further analyses examining nonstereotypical emotion knowledge. No other variables were significantly associated with child age.

T-tests were performed to check for child gender, parent gender, and birth order (first born or later born) differences (see Table 7). Child gender differences were apparent for social competence scores ( $t(35) = -2.120, p = .046$ ). Examination of the means indicated that females (mean = 44.905) had higher social competence scores than males (mean = 39.313), so child gender was included in further

analyses examining this outcome. As Table 7 shows, no child gender differences were apparent for stereotypical or nonstereotypical emotion knowledge. However, because of the prevalence of child gender differences in the literature on emotion understanding, child gender was included in analyses for emotion understanding outcomes.

Parent gender differences were present for explanations during positive events ( $t(36) = -3.293$ ,  $p = .002$ ). Examination of the means indicated that mothers (mean = .060) used more emotion explanations during positive events than fathers (mean = .012). Parent gender differences were not present for any outcome variable, so parent gender was not included in future analyses.

Child birth order differences were present for social competence scores ( $t(35) = 2.736$ ,  $p = .010$ ). Examination of the means indicate that first born children (mean = 45.842) had higher social competence scores than later born children (mean = 38.944).

## **Hypothesis Testing**

I first note that there was a trend for parental indirect communication during positive events to be associated with parental indirect communication during negative events ( $r(49) = .259$ ,  $p = .070$ ). This means that parents who used more indirect communication during one event discussion also engaged in more, indirect communication in the other event discussion. I also note that out of a total of 4,465 parent subject-verb phrases for the overall sample, 474 were categorized as indirect communication. This means that for this study, only 10.62% of subject-verb phrases were indirect.

Hypotheses examining associations between parental indirect communication and other measures of parental emotion socialization were performed using correlations, first separated only by positive and negative events, then again separated by child gender as well as positive and negative

events. Please see Tables 5 and 6. Fisher's r-to-z transformations were then calculated to examine whether or not correlations were significantly different from each other. Please see Table 8.

**Hypothesis 1a: Relation of indirect communication to elaboration.** Parental indirect communication during positive events was unrelated to parental elaboration during positive events ( $r(51) = -.028, p = .853$ ) and parental indirect communication during negative events was unrelated to parental elaboration during negative events ( $r(49) = -.071, p = .618$ ). These non-significant correlations for positive compared with negative events were not significantly different, as may be seen by examining Fisher's r-to-z transformation ( $z = .21, p = .834$ ). Hypothesis 1ai was that parents who employ more indirect communication will use more elaboration, particularly during discussion of positive events. Thus, hypothesis 1ai was not supported.

Once separated by gender, the association between parental indirect communication during positive events and elaboration during positive events was not significant for boys ( $r(21) = -.061, p = .781$ ) or for girls ( $r(28) = -.008, p = .966$ ). This association was also not significant for negative events for boys ( $r(21) = -.072, p = .745$ ) or girls ( $r(26) = -.055, p = .781$ ). Fisher's r-to-z transformation did not show a significant difference between the association for parental indirect communication and elaboration for girls and boys during positive events ( $z = -.018, p = .857$ ) or negative events ( $z = -.06, p = .952$ ). Hypothesis 1aii was that parents of daughters who employ more indirect communication will use more elaboration. As such, hypothesis 1aii was not supported.

**Hypothesis 1b: Relation of indirect communication to use of labels and explanations.** Parents' indirect communication during positive events was unrelated to parental labels ( $r(51) = -.023, p = .868$ ) or explanations during positive events ( $r(51) = .107, p = .444$ ) and parental indirect communication during negative events was unrelated to parental use of labels ( $r(49) = -.259, p = .067$ ) or explanations ( $r(49) = .147, p = .302$ ) during negative events. Fisher's r-to-z transformation did not

show a significant difference between correlations with parental indirect communication separated by event for labels ( $z = 1.2, p = .230$ ) or explanations ( $z = -.2, p = .842$ ). Hypothesis 1bi was that parents who employ more indirect communication will use more labels and explanations, particularly when discussing negative events. Therefore, hypothesis 1bi was not supported.

Once separated by gender, parental indirect communication during positive events for boys was unrelated to parental use of labels ( $r(21) = -.124, p = .572$ ) or explanations for positive events ( $r(21) = .101, p = .647$ ) and for girls was unrelated to the use of parental labels ( $r(28) = .021, p = .913$ ) or explanations for positive events ( $r(28) = .114, p = .549$ ). Furthermore, parental indirect communication during negative events was not significantly associated with parental labels or explanations during negative events for boys ( $r(21) = -.160, p = .465$ ;  $r(21) = .358, p = .093$ ) or girls ( $r(26) = -.363, p = .058$ ;  $r(26) = .010, p = .959$ ). Although not significant, there was a trend for parents who use more indirectness during negative event discussions to use less emotion labels during negative events for the sample overall and for girls, as well as more emotion explanations with boys. Fisher's *r*-to-*z* transformation did not show a significant difference between the association for parental indirect communication and labels for girls and boys during positive events ( $z = -.49, p = .624$ ) or negative events ( $z = .73, p = .465$ ). The same was true for the correlations between parental indirect communication and parental explanations for girls and boys for positive ( $z = -.04, p = .968$ ) and negative events ( $z = 1.22, p = .222$ ). Hypothesis 1bii was that parents of daughters who employ more indirect communication will use more labels and explanations. So, hypothesis 1bii was not supported.

Although hypothesis 1 was not supported, I note that parental indirect communication during positive events was related to parental explanations during negative events for the entire sample overall ( $r(49) = .293, p = .039$ ) as well as for boys ( $r(21) = .646, p = .001$ ), but not girls ( $r(26) = .090, p = .650$ ) when the sample was separated by gender. Fisher's *r*-to-*z* transformation showed that the correlations

between parental indirect communication during positive events and parental explanations during negative events were significantly different for boys and girls ( $z = 2.3, p = .021$ ).

**Hypothesis 2: Relation of indirect communication to child emotion understanding and social competence.** Stepwise regressions were used to test whether indirect communication would predict the outcome variables (stereotypical emotion knowledge, nonstereotypical emotion knowledge, and social competence) after accounting for elaboration, labels, and explanations. Two separate stepwise regressions (one for communication during positive events, one for communication during negative events) were conducted for each outcome, yielding a total of 6 models tested.

Please see Tables 9 and 10 for regression results for stereotypical emotion knowledge. Child gender was entered at step 1. Parental elaboration, labels, and explanations were entered in at step 2. Finally, indirect communication was entered in at step 3. Neither the omnibus model for positive events ( $F(5, 47) = .477, p = .792$ ) nor that for negative events ( $F(5, 45) = .342, p = .885$ ) was significant.

Please see Tables 11 and 12 for regression results for nonstereotypical emotion knowledge. Child age and gender were entered in at step 1. Parental elaboration, labels, and explanations were entered in at step 2. Lastly, indirect communication was entered in at step 3. The omnibus model for positive events was not significant,  $F(6, 46) = 1.091, p = .382$ . The omnibus model for negative events showed a non-significant trend,  $F(6, 44) = 2.014, p = .084$ . Examination of beta coefficients showed a significant association of child age with nonstereotypical knowledge, with older children scoring higher ( $\beta = .334, p = .01$ ). Furthermore, there was a trend for parents' indirect communication during the negative event to be associated with lower nonstereotypical knowledge ( $\beta = -.25, p = .094$ ). Please see Tables 10 and 11.



Please see Tables 13 and 14 for regression results for social competence. Child age and birth order were entered in at step 1. Parental elaboration, labels, and explanations were entered in at step 2. Finally, indirect communication was entered in at step 3. Omnibus values from both models were significant ( $F= 3.969 (6, 28), p= .005$  for positive event model;  $F= 2.891 (6, 26), p= .027$  for negative event model). Child gender showed a trend with social competence in the positive event model ( $\beta= .363, p= .058$ ) and birth order showed significant associations with social competence in both event models ( $\beta= -.389, p= .025$  for positive event model;  $\beta= -.397, p= .023$  for negative event model). Parental explanations still showed associations with the outcome variable for the positive event model ( $\beta= .397, p= .010$ ). Indirect communication was entered in at this step for both models, but showed no associations with social competence for either event model ( $\beta= .101, p= .486$  for positive event model;  $\beta= .218, p= .223$  for negative event model).

Overall, the stepwise regressions for each outcome did not show significant associations with parental indirect communication. The one non-significant trend, for parental indirect communication during the negative event to be related to lower nonstereotypical emotion knowledge was in the opposite direction than expected. Hypothesis 2 was that after accounting for effects of elaboration and parents' use of emotion labels and emotion explanations, parents who employ indirect communication will have children with better emotion understanding and social competence. This was not evident in the data and therefore, hypothesis 2 was not supported.

## **Discussion**

This study was designed to examine the associations between a method of parental emotion socialization in parent-child discourse adapted from literature in linguistics (indirect communication) with two commonly researched parental socialization methods in the field of developmental

psychology (elaboration and labels/explanations). Furthermore, this study was designed to assess the relations of indirect communication with two child socio-emotional outcomes (emotion understanding and social competence). Based on research in psychology examining parental elaboration and use of labels/explanations, it was hypothesized that parents who use indirect communication will also use more elaboration, emotion labels, and explanations. Moreover, it was also hypothesized that parents who use indirect communication would have children with better emotion understanding and social competence. Overall, hypotheses were not supported. Parental indirect communication did not co-occur with parental elaboration, labels, or explanations and did not predict children's emotion understanding or social competence. In the sections below I review the aims of this study and how these aims were (or were not) accomplished.

It is worth noting that one of the most common forms of indirectness in this study came in the form of redressed questions. Such mitigated or redressed questions are common in everyday communication as they are used as politeness strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987) and as a result are now conventionalized. Thus, they may not be very salient for children and may not require the cognitive unpacking that other forms of indirectness do. Because this form of indirectness has been conventionalized, it may be out of parents' awareness and may be an unmarked way of communicating with their child. As such, children may interpret these messages as normal and have little difficulty interpreting them, which would mean there is no added benefit of cognitive unpacking and therefore no advantage in terms of children's socio-emotional development. This may be a reason for the general lack of associations between parental indirect communication and children's social outcomes, discussed below.

## **Aim 1: Examine Links of Indirect Communication with Other Forms of Emotion Socialization in Parent-Child Discourse**

As noted above, parental indirect communication was unrelated to established measures of parental emotion socialization as had been hypothesized. In other words, parental indirect communication when talking about positive events was unrelated to parental elaboration, labels, or explanations when talking about positive events, and parental indirect communication when talking about negative events was unrelated to parental elaboration, labels, and explanations when talking about negative events. This suggests the possibility that parental indirect communication may not be a strategy used to help children learn about emotions, but rather a parental style that may appear for a variety of reasons. For example, it could be the case that parents employ indirect communication to regulate their own emotions during these conversations as a reaction to the child. If this is the case, then indirect communication may be a strategy to keep the conversation going smoothly rather than to improve children's emotional development. It could also be the case that parents are engaging in indirectness to avoid explicit exertion of authority, thus preserving the relationship. Grusec and Goodnow (1994) explain that parental goals of clarity and explicitness may be sacrificed in order to preserve the parent-child relationship. If this is the case, then parents may employ indirect communication to avoid negative outcomes rather than to promote positive ones in terms of children's emotional development.

It is notable that the consistency of indirect communication across positive and negative events was modest and non-significant, suggesting that parents may have valence-specific styles of using indirect communication, or that parents' use of indirect communication is situationally variable and not

a consistent individual difference. As noted earlier, occurrence of indirectness was rather low in this sample (474 subject-phrases, 10.62% of total subject-verb phrases). The modest consistency across event types suggests that even though occurrence of indirectness was low, parents who engaged in indirect communication during one event type were likely to do so in the other event type as well.

Further research will be needed to determine whether there are individual differences in parents' use of indirect communication across time and discourse topics.

The significant association of parental emotion explanations when talking about negative events with indirect communication when talking about positive events, which held only for boys and not girls, was unexpected. It appears that parents who used more emotion explanations during discussion of negative events with their sons also employed more indirect communication during discussion of positive events. Parents' use of emotion explanations in conversations about past emotional events is positively associated with children's emotion understanding (Doan & Wang, 2010; Dunn et al., 1991; Garner et al., 1997; Garner et al., 2008; Martin & Green, 2005) and social competence (Sales & Fivush, 2005). However, this finding was not apparent in the current sample. Emotion explanations occur more during discussions of negative events than positive events (Fivush, 1991; Lagattuta & Wellman, 2002; Sales & Fivush, 2005) and parental elaboration occurs more during discussion of positive events (Fivush, Berlin, Sales, Mennuti-Washburn, & Cassidy, 2003; Melzi & Fernandez, 2004; Wang, 2001; Wang & Fivush, 2005). Both of these findings held in the current study, though the difference between parental elaboration during positive and negative event discussions was small.

Perhaps the link of parental indirect communication during positive events and use of emotion explanations during negative events with sons suggests flexibility in parents' use of different discourse patterns depending on the conversation topic. Perhaps parents are engaging in these strategies for these certain event discussions because they perceive these strategies as being the most helpful during those discussions. Parental use of emotion explanations is more common during negative event discussions than positive ones whereas parental elaboration is more common during positive event discussions than negative ones. This suggests that the emotion under discussion an important contextual factor that contributes to parents' emotion socialization strategies. These strategies may be more effective for sons than daughters because parents are perceiving that sons are lower in emotion understanding and social competence than daughters are. Moreover, research on adult indirectness indicates that men are more indirect than women in expressing emotions other than anger (Tannen, 2000). This suggests that male children could be socialized to be indirect in this context. If this is the case, then parents are more likely to communicate indirectly about emotions with sons than with daughters but may be more likely to communicate indirectly about other topics such as requests with daughters than with sons.

Bird and Reese (2006) found that parents' pattern of a high level of references to negative emotions combined with a low level of references to positive emotions was related to inconsistent self-concept in preschool-aged children. These results suggest the importance of holistic examination of parent discourse about positive and negative emotion-related events. It may be that the balance of types of discourse across positive and negative emotions is influential for children's socio-emotional development.

Although not the focus of the current study, I noted that parental elaboration and labels/explanations were not related in either valence-concordant or non-concordant event discussions in the full sample. When the sample was separated by child gender, elaboration during positive events was only associated with parental labels during negative event discussions for boys and with parental explanations during positive event discussions for girls. Previous research has shown that parental use of labels/explanations and elaboration co-occurs (Laible, 2004a; Laible & Song, 2006). However, these studies measured parental elaboration on 5-point scale (one score for each parent) rather than examining parental elaboration on an subject-verb phrase level (then calculating proportions of elaborative speech over total subject-verb phrases). On the other hand, some studies have found that parental elaboration and use of labels/explanations were not related (Laible, 2004b; van Bergen & Salmon, 2010). Despite measuring elaboration, labels, and/or explanations, others have not reported the associations between them (Farrar, Fasig, & Welch-Ross, 1997; Fivush et al., 2003; Laible, 2011; Laible, Murphy, & Augustine, 2013; Levy, Berrocal, & Nolivov, 2013; Wang, 2001; Wang & Fivush, 2005).

A premise of this study was that these emotion socialization strategies occur together. However, closer examination of the literature shows that evidence on this is mixed. Findings from the present study do not support the notion that parental elaboration and labels/explanations co-occur. Thus, it may not be surprising that parental indirect communication did not co-occur with these established measures of parental emotion socialization, as the established measures did not co-occur in this sample either.

Each parental emotion socialization strategy in this study was measured at the subject-verb phrase level rather than globally. Measuring at the subject-verb phrase level gives a more in-depth analysis of parents' discourse and is less susceptible (but not completely free from) to the bias that a global rating can yield, as one score is given to each dyad. In the process of giving one score to each dyad (such as with elaboration), it can be difficult not to incorporate other aspects of the parent-child conversation such as sensitivity, warmth, and general kindness. Measuring at the subject-verb phrase level addresses these concerns by examining each subject-verb phrase then aggregating to understand an overall picture of how often parents engage in a certain emotion socialization strategy.

## **Aim 2: Examine Links of Indirect Communication with Child Outcomes**

The second aim of the current study was to examine whether indirect communication was associated with children's emotion understanding and social competence after accounting for the other types of emotion socialization discourse. As noted above, there was no support for this in the current study results, as there were no significant associations of indirect communication with any of the child outcomes. In fact, the one non-significant trend, for parental indirect communication during negative event discussions to be associated with children's nonstereotypical emotion knowledge, was in the opposite direction than hypothesized. Parental indirectness during negative event reminiscing was related to children's *lower* nonstereotypical emotion knowledge. Children who are low in nonstereotypical emotion knowledge are less skilled at perspective-taking and may find it difficult to understand indirectness because they cannot think about these subject-verb phrases from the parent's point of view. This may be specific to discussions about negative rather than positive events because for children this age, negative event discussions are already difficult to process. Therefore, having to

decode subject-verb phrases from the parent may increase children's cognitive load too much during these conversations, interfering with their learning about emotions.

Alternatively, indirectness during negative event discussions may result from parents' reaction to the child and the conversation that is occurring rather than as a strategy to benefit the child's emotional development. For example, when children are low in nonstereotypical emotion knowledge, it may be more difficult for parents to engage in discussions about negative events with the child. Indirect communication may be a way for parents to express frustration or lighten their own mood without upsetting the child. Overall, however, results suggest that parents' indirect communication is unrelated to children's emotion understanding and social competence.

In retrospect, my logic that parents who use more elaboration and labels/explanations would also use more indirectness may have been mistaken. My rationale was that parents, who have more power in the parent-child relationship, would make use of their power by flexibly using an array of strategies throughout these conversations. Because indirectness can function in a context-specific way to soften or mitigate threatening communication, I expected that indirectness would more strongly relate to elaboration and labels/explanations in the contexts where each of these strategies has been shown to occur the most during parent-child conversations about past events. These hypotheses were not supported, suggesting that an implicit assumption of my rationale – that indirectness would be used to make emotions more salient to children in these discussions – may have been mistaken.

Elaboration, emotion labels, and explanations can all be interpreted as explicit and direct ways of discussing past emotional events that focus attention on emotions. I had expected indirect communication to require cognitive unpacking on the part of the child, thereby also making emotions



more salient. However, indirectness during these conversations can be a way of avoiding explicit discussion of emotions or the emotional event. As an example from the data, “they want us to talk about something that made you happy,” is indirect because it is an expressive in the form of a representative. Though this phrase mentions an emotion term, it could be masking the positive emotion that occurred during this event underneath the instructions that the dyad was given to discuss this event. This phrase could be interpreted as explaining a task rather than a desire to talk about the emotional event.

Moreover, my coding scheme did not distinguish indirect communication about the emotion-related events from indirect communication that was about the child’s behavior during the conversation (i.e., getting the child to engage in the conversation or sit still). Parents’ indirectness that occurs as a form of mitigation when giving directives about the child’s behavior may not depend on the context or the topic of the conversation, but rather the child’s behavior during the conversation. It’s possible that indirect communication when giving behavioral directives may relate to some socio-emotional outcomes such as self-regulation, but not to the outcomes of emotion understanding and social competence examined in the present study.

Based on the literature for elaboration and labels/explanations, I had also hypothesized that indirect communication would occur more in conversations with daughters than with sons. Once again, these hypotheses did not sufficiently take into account the literature on indirectness in linguistics. Tannen (2000) explains that there is a common misconception that women are more indirect than men. Instead, she points out that most studies finding that women are more indirect than men are focused on attempts to get others to do things. On the other hand, studies that find that men are more indirect have

to do with expressions of emotions other than anger. If men are more indirect than women when expressing emotions (except for anger), perhaps parents teach their children to communicate indirectly in emotion-specific ways. This relates to Hymes (1972) idea of communicative competence in that parents are teaching their children how to use language in their culture, which may be different for boys and girls. Hypotheses about differences between conversations with sons and daughters were not supported, and there were no child sex differences in parents' use of indirect communication in the conversations about positive and negative events. This suggests that perhaps child gender does not have the same influence on parents' indirectness as on elaboration and labels and explanations. Future research could address whether there are child gender differences in parents' use of indirectness for requests and for discussion of emotions. In summary, further integration of the linguistics literature with developmental psychology research may yield richer, more nuanced exploration of the role of indirectness in parental emotion socialization. The current study provides a strong starting point for this future work by operationalizing coding of indirect communication in parent-child discourse in a way that can be built upon in future work.

### **Strengths, Limitations, and Future Directions**

A strength of this study was the reliance on theory (Searle, 1976) to create a scheme to measure parental indirectness during these parent-child conversations. Rather than identifying indirectness by first examining the data, a theoretical framework was applied in which to make the coding systematic and applicable to other studies examining discourse data. Moreover, the indirectness coding scheme created for this study utilized the entirety of the parent-child conversations, rather than only analyzing

“on-topic” subject-verb phrases. This utilization of the entire parent-child conversation makes more use of the conversation data than previously established measures of parent emotion socialization as well as depicts a more naturalistic representation of conversations in analyzing the complete conversation rather than parts of it.

Another strength of this study was the use of well-established measures for elaboration (Fivush & Fromhoff, 1988), labels and explanations (Cervantes & Callanan, 1998), emotion understanding (Denham, 1986) and social competence (LaFreniere & Dumas, 1996). Still, these measures exemplified lower internal consistency than is typical for this age group. For emotion understanding, this may have been because of ceiling effects and for social competence, this may have been due to a lower sample size than typical for this measure only ( $n= 37$ , since measures of social competence were not returned for every child). The sample size for this study is consistent with other studies examining parental emotion socialization through discourse. These consistencies with other studies in this field indicate that methodology was consistent with prior literature with the exception of a new, introduced method of emotion socialization.

This study also had some noteworthy limitations. First, the sample included predominantly White, well-educated parents. This did not allow examination of how parent indirect communication might manifest and relate to other forms of emotion-related discourse and to child socio-emotional outcomes across socioeconomic and cultural contexts. Situating developmental processes within broader contexts is critical for understanding any process in children’s social development (Raver, 2004). Future research extending examination of indirect communication to a variety of racial, socioeconomic, and cultural groups is needed. For example, research in Japanese culture indicates that

politeness is an important value and is emphasized in socialization of Japanese children starting in infancy (Burdelski, 2010). As such, it would be interesting to examine if parents employ indirect communication in this culture as part of the emphasis on politeness and if so, if it relates to children's social outcomes.

Second, and relatedly, the lack of replication of findings with the current sample raises some concern. Specifically, as discussed in the introduction, the extant literature robustly supports links of parents' elaboration and labels/explanations with children's emotion understanding and social competence. Parental emotion explanations are related to children's emotion understanding (Doan & Wang, 2010; Dunn et al., 1991; Garner et al., 1997; Garner et al., 2008; Martin & Green, 2005). Regarding children's social competence, parental emotion explanations are associated with lower externalizing behavior problems (Sales & Fivush, 2005). Yet in the current study, parental explanations when talking about positive or negative events were unrelated to emotion understanding, and only parental explanations when talking about positive events was associated with children's social competence. Although this link underscores the importance of focusing on positive as well as negative emotions, the absence of replication in regard to parental explanations about negative emotions is surprising.

Past research has indicated that parental elaborative style is associated with preschooler's emotion understanding (Laible, 2004a; Laible, 2004b; Laible & Song, 2006; van Bergen & Salmon, 2010). Regarding preschooler's social competence, prior literature has also shown that parental elaborative style is associated with children's prosocial behavior (Laible, 2004a; Laible & Song, 2006) and social problem-solving skills (Levy et al., 2013). Yet in the current study, parents' elaborations

when talking about positive and negative events were unrelated to emotion understanding and social competence. Furthermore, neither stereotypical nor nonstereotypical emotion understanding was related to children's social competence, even though previous research indicates that these variables are associated (Cassidy et al., 1992; Denham et al., 2003; Goldman et al., 1980; Izard et al., 2001; Miller et al., 2005; Mostow et al., 2002). This suggests exercising caution in interpreting the lack of associations between predictors and outcome variables.

Average scores in this sample for emotion understanding as well as for social competence were consistent with prior literature for the preschool-age group (Denham et al., 2003; Perez-Rivera & Dunsmore, 2011). Sample demographics were mostly consistent with prior literature (predominantly White, well-educated, upper-middle class, though some of the research was geared at certain ethnic groups such as Latino families). Sample size was also consistent. However, social competence measures were not collected for every child in the study; rather, a little over half of the children's preschool teachers returned the social competence measures.

Despite consistency with prior literature in the measures, outcome scores, and sample, robust findings in the literature regarding parental emotion socialization and children's social outcomes were not supported in this study. Though emotion explanations have been found to be associated with children's emotion understanding, many of these studies have measured use of emotion explanations using a storytelling task rather than a discourse task (Doan & Wang, 2010; Garner et al., 1997; Garner et al., 2008; Martin & Green, 2005). Rather than a storytelling or discourse task, one study examined parental use of emotion explanations using naturalistic conversations recorded from home (Dunn et al., 1991). Moreover, findings regarding the association between parental elaboration and children's

emotion understanding as well as social competence have been measured on a 5-point scale (Laible, 2004a; Laible, 2004b; Laible & Song, 2006; Levy et al., 2013) or measured as either HI elab or LO elab (van Bergen & Salmon, 2010). Thus, measurement for these emotion socialization strategies as well as outcomes is not consistent across the literature, which could be a reason why these findings were not supported in this study.

Third, the study did not include measures of parent personality or general parenting style, or of child temperament. Such measures might have illuminated patterns in the use of indirect communication in parent-child dyads.

## **Conclusion**

Returning to the example from the introduction, this study emphasized the importance of understanding Jackson's parents' emotion socialization strategies to teach Jackson about emotions. As Jackson exemplified a struggle with both emotion understanding and social competence, the current study emphasized the importance of truly understanding parents' emotion socialization strategies in relation to children's social outcomes. The concept of indirect communication that was adapted in this study from linguistics literature was aimed at understanding *how* parents are communicating with children rather than *what* they are communicating. This view of parents' discourse during conversations about emotions is holistic in two ways: understanding how parents utilize different strategies during a conversation as well as examining parental emotion socialization throughout the entirety of the conversation, rather than just the parts deemed as "on-topic." To truly understand children's social development (or lack thereof, in Jackson's case), future research examining children's social outcomes should utilize a broader, more holistic view of parents' discourse.

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Table 1.

*Parent Discourse Constructs.*

<b>Construct</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Example</b>	<b>Rationalization</b>
Elaboration	Narrative style that involves asking questions about the event, providing descriptive information about the event, and incorporating children's responses into the conversation	"Do you remember a few weeks ago when we went to Hawaii?"	Parent is asking a question about the event (does the child remember) and provides information about the event (going to Hawaii)
Emotion label	Parents' direct naming of an emotion	"You seemed pretty happy when I picked you up."	Parent is labeling the child's emotion as happy during this event
Emotion explanation	Parent links emotion word to information about the cause or consequence of the emotion	"Were you upset that I didn't give you a hug and a kiss goodbye?"	Parent is linking the emotion the child felt during this event (upset) as caused by not getting a hug and kiss goodbye
Indirectness	Subject-verb phrase in which parent's locution is not concordant with their illocution; when parents say something has any interpretation beyond the literal meaning	"Can we talk about the zoo some more?"	Directive to talk about going to the zoo in the form of a question "can we?"

Table 2.

*Demographic Information of Continuous Variables (n= 55)*

	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Parent age	37.8	4.17	31	46
Child age	4.34	.479	4	5

Table 3.  
*Demographic Information of Categorical Variables (n=55)*

Variable	Demographic Information
Parent type	Mothers: 44 Fathers: 11
Parent education	College begun: 4 College degree: 17 Grad begun: 3 Grad degree: 31
Parent ethnicity	African American: 2 Asian American: 5 European American: 46 Latino: 2
Parent marital status	Single: 1 Married: 47 Separated: 1 Co-habit: 1 Not reported: 5
Child gender	Male: 24 Female: 31
Birth order	First born: 19 Later born: 36
Child ethnicity	African American: 4 Asian American: 4 European American: 44 Latino: 3



Table 4.  
*Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables.*

Variable Name	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev	Skewness (Std. E)	Kurtosis (Std. E)
Pos elab	53	.00	.75	.375	.162	-.254 (.327)	-.08 (.644)
Pos label	53	.00	.25	.039	.055	2.042 (.327)	4.345 (.644)
Pos exp	53	.00	.31	.051	.069	1.877 (.327)	3.781 (.644)
Pos indirect	53	.00	.27	.096	.067	.995 (.327)	.284 (.644)
Neg elab	51	.04	.74	.357	.148	-.028 (.333)	.045 (.656)
Neg label	51	.00	.21	.067	.055	.708 (.333)	-.141(.656)
Neg exp	51	.00	.44	.098	.093	1.589 (.333)	3.005 (.656)
Neg indirect	51	.00	.27	.12	.067	.256 (.333)	-.407 (.656)
EU expressive	55	4	8	7.182	.796	-1.487 (.322)	4.135 (.634)
EU receptive	55	5	8	7.746	.726	-2.885 (.322)	7.445 (.634)
EU stereotyp (before Winsor)	55	7	16	14.836	1.664	-2.383 (.322)	8.208 (.634)
EU nonstereotyp (before Winsor)	55	5	24	21.146	3.188	-2.643 (.322)	11.304 (.634)
Overall EU (before Winsor)	55	27	56	50.909	4.839	-2.546 (.322)	10.219 (.634)
EU stereotyp (after Winsor)	55	11	16	14.909	1.378	-1.241 (.322)	.892 (.634)
EU nonstereotyp (after Winsor)	55	15	24	21.327	2.45	-.858 (.322)	.360 (.634)
Overall EU (after Winsor)	55	40	56	51.164	3.819	-1.008 (.322)	.759 (.634)
Social comp	37	27	57	42.487	8.325	.038 (.388)	-.843 (.759)

Table 5.  
*Bivariate Correlations Between Study Variables.*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Child age	--													
2. Birth order	.115	--												
3. Child sex	-.052	-.319*	--											
4. EU stereotyp	.068	-.143	.022	--										
5. EU nonstereotyp	.267*	-.157	-.108	.503**	--									
6. Social comp	.134	-.42**	.337*	.027	.041	--								
7. Pos elab	.065	.331*	-.027	.000	-.132	-.136	--							
8. Pos label	-.128	-.334*	.184	-.068	-.133	-.045	-.176	--						
9. Pos exp	.038	-.301*	.173	-.008	.019	.439**	-.071	.322*	--					
10. Pos indirect	.039	-.131	.016	.21	.101	.044	-.028	-.023	.107	--				
11. Neg elab	.017	-.103	.091	.135	.198	.31+	.197	.041	-.082	-.017	--			
12. Neg label	-.005	-.046	.085	.021	-.14	-.016	.11	.245+	.379**	.017	-.007	--		

13. Neg exp	-.035	-.137	.063	.127	-.143	.143	.044	.132	.239+	.293*	.046	.318*	--
14. Neg indirect	.168	.022	-.076	.057	-.16	.25	.043	-.023	-.1	.259+	-.071	-.259+	.147 --

*Note.* +  $p < .1$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ .  $N = 55$  for EU variables,  $N = 53$  for discourse variables,  $N = 37$  for social comp.

Table 6.  
*Bivariate Correlations Between Study Variables for Boys and Girls Separately.*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Child age	--	.220	-.25	.324	-.182	.069	-.116	.126	-.208	-.148	.07	-.185	-.102
2. Birth order	.023	--	.009	.019	-.377	.25	-.122	-.153	-.524	-.129	.226	-.18	-.327
3. EU stereotyp	.289	-.245	--	.194	-.049	.01	-.007	.201	.034	.12	.119	-.031	-.1
4. EU nonstereotyp	.241	-.312+	.663**	--	-.014	-.082	-.149	.000	-.21	.184	-.149	-.363+	-.3
5. Social comp	.398+	-.366	.023	.166	--	.021	.113	.437	.299	-.108	-.149	.333	.411
6. Pos elab	.062	.39*	-.006	-.156	-.387+	--	.189	.332	-.061	.579**	.449**	.186	-.288
7. Pos label	-.131	-.388*	-.098	-.105	-.105	-.321+	--	.077	-.124	.15	.238	.013	.093
8. Pos exp	-.033	-.378*	-.2	.066	.427+	-.385*	.476**	--	.101	-.107	.394+	.308	-.02
9. Pos indirect	.215	.138	.331+	.253	-.124	-.008	.021	.114	--	.026	-.116	.646**	.345
10. Neg elab	.215	-.031	.165	.257	.561*	-.099	-.082	-.084	-.075	--	-.039	-.063	-.072
11. Neg label	-.059	-.216	-.052	-.132	.016	-.097	.243	.359+	.113	.016	--	.376+	-.16
12. Neg exp	.064	-.09	.22	-.048	-.02	-.019	.187	.186	.09	.143	.276	--	.358+
13. Neg indirect	.435*	.301	.2	-.097	.02	.272	-.085	-.154	.212	-.055	-.363+	-.010	--

*Note.* +  $p < .1$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ .  $N = 55$  for EU variables,  $N = 53$  for discourse variables,  $N = 37$  for social comp. Boys above the diagonal, girls below

Table 7.  
*T-test results with outcome variables.*

		t	Mean difference	Std. error difference
Child gender				
	EU stereotyp	.790	.528	.668
	EU nonstereotyp	-.160	-.061	.378
	Social comp	-2.120*	-5.592	2.638
Parent gender				
	EU stereotyp	.978	.454	.465
	EU nonstereotyp	1.591	1.295	.814
	Social comp	-1.052	-3.491	3.320
Birth order				
	EU stereotyp	1.160	.765	.660
	EU nonstereotyp	1.052	.391	.371
	Social comp	2.736*	6.898	2.521

*Note.* \*  $p < .05$

Table 8.  
*Fisher's r-to-z-scores for bivariate correlations.*

Correlation 1	Correlation 2	Z-value for difference between correlations
Pos indirect and pos elab ( $r = -.028$ )	Neg indirect and neg elab ( $r = -.259$ )	$z = .21$
Pos indirect and pos elab boys ( $r = -.061$ )	Pos indirect and pos elab girls ( $r = -.008$ )	$z = -.018$
Neg indirect and neg elab boys ( $r = -.072$ )	Neg indirect and neg elab girls ( $r = -.055$ )	$z = -.06$
Pos indirect and pos label ( $r = -.023$ )	Neg indirect and neg label ( $r = -.259$ )	$z = 1.2$
Pos indirect and pos exp ( $r = .107$ )	Neg indirect and neg exp ( $r = .147$ )	$z = -.2$
Pos indirect and pos label boys ( $r = -.124$ )	Pos indirect and pos label girls ( $r = .021$ )	$z = -.49$
Neg indirect and neg label boys ( $r = -.16$ )	Neg indirect and neg label girls ( $r = -.363$ )	$z = .73$
Pos indirect and pos exp boys ( $r = .101$ )	Pos indirect and pos exp girls ( $r = .114$ )	$z = -.04$
Neg indirect and neg exp boys ( $r = .358$ )	Neg indirect and neg exp girls ( $r = -.01$ )	$z = 1.22$
Pos indirect and neg exp boys ( $r = .646$ )	Pos indirect and neg exp girls ( $r = .09$ )	$z = 2.3^*$

*Note.* \*  $p < .05$

Table 9.

*Standard Coefficients and Standard Errors for Predictors of Children's Stereotypical Emotion Understanding from Discourse during the Positive Event*

		Unstd B (Std. Error)	Standardized $\beta$	$\Delta R^2$
1	Child gender	-.013 (.389)	-.005	.000
2	Child gender	.018 (.41)	.006	.005
	Pos elab	-.105 (1.256)	-.012	
	Pos label	-1.894 (3.901)	-.076	
	Pos exp	.296 (3.101)	.015	
3	Child gender	.014 (.405)	.005	.043
	Pos elab	-.048 (1.242)	-.006	
	Pos label	-1.522 (3.864)	-.061	
	Pos exp	-.243 (3.087)	-.012	
	Pos indirect	4.380 (2.995)	.210	

*Note.* Omnibus  $F(5, 47) = .477, p = .792, R^2 = .048$

Table 10.

*Standard Coefficients and Standard Errors for Predictors of Children's Stereotypical Emotion Understanding from Discourse during the Negative Event*

		Unstd B (Std. Error)	Standardized $\beta$	$\Delta R^2$
1	Child gender	-.064 (.393)	-.023	.001
2	Child gender	-.116 (.402)	-.042	.034
	Neg elab	1.239 (1.361)	.133	
	Neg label	-.373 (3.848)	-.015	
	Neg exp	1.907 (2.283)	.128	
3	Child gender	-.108 (.407)	-.039	.002
	Neg elab	1.275 (1.380)	.136	
	Neg label	.027 (4.11)	.001	
	Neg exp	1.722 (2.386)	.115	
	Neg indirect	.977 (3.262)	.047	

*Note.* Omnibus  $F(5, 45) = .342, p = .885, R^2 = .037$



Table 11.

*Standard Coefficients and Standard Errors for Predictors of Children's Nonstereotypical Emotion Understanding from Discourse during the Positive Event*

		Unstd B (Std. Error)	Standardized $\beta$	$\Delta R^2$
1	Child gender	-.480 (.661)	-.099	.08
	Child age (mo)	.095 (.049)	.263+	
2	Child gender	-.432 (.685)	-.089	.038
	Child age (mo)	.092 (.05)	.255+	
	Pos elab	-2.558 (2.099)	-.17	
	Pos label	-5.776 (6.569)	-.131	
	Pos exp	1.926 (5.195)	.054	
3	Child gender	-.435 (.689)	-.089	.006
	Child age (mo)	.092 (.051)	.253+	
	Pos elab	-2.518 (2.115)	-.167	
	Pos label	-5.539 (6.629)	-.126	
	Pos exp	1.57 (5.268)	.044	
	Pos indirect	2.594 (5.095)	.081	

*Note.* Omnibus  $F(6, 46) = 1.091, p = .382, R^2 = .125, + p < .10$

Table 12.

*Standard Coefficients and Standard Errors for Predictors of Children's Nonstereotypical Emotion Understanding from Discourse during the Negative Event*

		Unstd B (Std. Error)	Standardized $\beta$	$\Delta R^2$
1	Child gender	-.332 (.668)	-.068	.096
	Child age (mo)	.107 (.049)	.298*	
2	Child gender	-.352 (.67)	-.072	.067
	Child age (mo)	.104 (.049)	.29*	
	Neg elab	3.376 (2.264)	.205	
	Neg label	-4.283 (6.399)	-.097	
	Neg exp	-2.827 (3.798)	-.107	
3	Child gender	-.408 (.657)	-.084	.052
	Child age (mo)	.12 (.049)	.334*	
	Neg elab	3.025 (2.227)	.183	
	Neg label	-8.055 (6.643)	-.182	
	Neg exp	-1.060 (3.86)	-.04	
	Neg indirect	-9.159 (5.354)	-.25+	

Note. Omnibus  $F(6, 44) = 2.014, p = .084, R^2 = .215$ ; +  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$

Table 13.

*Standard Coefficients and Standard Errors for Predictors of Children's Social Competence from Discourse during the Positive Event*

		Unstd B (Std. Error)	Standardized $\beta$	$\Delta R^2$
1	Child gender	4.531 (2.5)	.278+	.279
	Birth order	-6.429 (2.475)	-.398*	
2	Child gender	4.742 (2.38)	.291+	.171
	Birth order	-6.123 (2.613)	-.379*	
	Pos elab	-5.624 (8.218)	-.104	
	Pos label	-31.482 (21.878)	-.215	
	Pos exp	50.275 (18.321)	.388*	
3	Child gender	4.739 (2.401)	.29+	.01
	Birth order	-6.285 (2.646)	-.389*	
	Pos elab	-4.378 (8.476)	-.081	
	Pos label	-30.867 (22.086)	-.211	
	Pos exp	51.365 (18.546)	.397*	
	Pos indirect	12.037 (17.051)	.101	

Note. Omnibus  $F(6, 28) = 3.969, p = .005, R^2 = .460; + p < .10, * p < .05$

Table 14.

*Standard Coefficients and Standard Errors for Predictors of Children's Social Competence from Discourse during the Negative Event*

		Unstd B (Std. Error)	Standardized $\beta$	$\Delta R^2$
1	Child gender	4.686 (2.459)	.29+	.341
	Birth order	-7.214 (2.459)	-.446*	
2	Child gender	4.522 (2.66)	.28	.024
	Birth order	-6.730 (2.666)	-.416*	
	Neg elab	4.311 (9.706)	.075	
	Neg label	-9.278 (21.76)	-.068	
	Neg exp	10.464 (12.827)	.129	
3	Child gender	4.027 (2.662)	.249	.036
	Birth order	-6.421 (2.650)	-.397*	
	Neg elab	6.73 (9.8)	.117	
	Neg label	3.77 (23.937)	.028	
	Neg exp	5.768 (13.241)	.071	
	Neg indirect	26.777 (21.436)	.218	

*Note.* Omnibus  $F(6, 26) = 2.891, p = .027, R^2 = .4; + p < .10, * p < .05$

**Appendix A**  
**Family Information Sheet**

Please help us describe the group of families who participated in this study with the information below.

<p><b>Yourself:</b>      Age? _____</p> <p>Relationship to child? (e.g., mother, father, grandmother, stepfather, etc.) _____</p> <p>Education (please check one):</p> <p><i>HS begun</i> ___ <i>HS degree</i> ___ <i>College begun</i> ___ <i>College degree</i> ___ <i>Grad begun</i> ___ <i>Grad degree</i> ___</p> <p>How would you describe your racial background? (please check as many as apply):</p> <p>African American _____</p> <p>Asian American _____</p> <p>European American (Caucasian) _____</p> <p>Native American _____</p> <p>Other _____</p> <p>Would you describe yourself as Hispanic and/or Latino/a? (please check one)</p> <p>Yes _____</p> <p>No _____</p>
--

<p><b>Your child's other parent:</b>      Age? _____</p> <p>Relationship to child? (e.g., mother, father, grandmother, stepfather, etc.) _____</p> <p>Education (please check one):</p> <p><i>HS begun</i> ___ <i>HS degree</i> ___ <i>College begun</i> ___ <i>College degree</i> ___ <i>Grad begun</i> ___ <i>Grad degree</i> ___</p> <p>How would your child's other parent describe his/her racial background? (please check as many as apply):</p> <p>African American _____</p> <p>Asian American _____</p> <p>European American (Caucasian) _____</p> <p>Native American _____</p> <p>Other _____</p> <p>Would your child's other parent describe himself/herself as Hispanic and/or Latino/a? (please check one)</p>
--

Yes \_\_\_\_\_

No \_\_\_\_\_

What is your **marital status**? *Single Married Divorced Separated Widow Co-Habit*

**Your Child's:** Age? \_\_\_\_\_ Gender? \_\_\_\_\_ Birthdate (month & year only)? \_\_\_\_\_

How would you describe your child's racial background? (please check as many as apply):

African American \_\_\_\_\_

Asian American \_\_\_\_\_

European American (Caucasian) \_\_\_\_\_

Native American \_\_\_\_\_

Other \_\_\_\_\_

Would you describe your child as Hispanic and/or Latino/a? (please check one)

Yes \_\_\_\_\_

No \_\_\_\_\_

How many **children** are there **in your family**? \_\_\_\_\_

*Please list their sex and age below:*

	<i>Age</i>	<i>Sex</i>
Child 1	_____	_____
Child 2	_____	_____
Child 3	_____	_____

	<i>Age</i>	<i>Sex</i>
Child 4	_____	_____
Child 5	_____	_____
Child 6	_____	_____

Additional:

How much is **your family** yearly income? Please make the best estimate you can and include income from all sources (wages, salaries, Social Security, retirement benefits, help from relatives, rent from property, ...)

<u>Yearly</u>	<u>Monthly</u>
_____ \$0-\$4,999	(0-\$416)
_____ \$5,000-\$9,999	(\$417-\$833)
_____ \$10,000-\$14,999	(\$834-\$1,249)
_____ \$15,000-\$19,999	(\$1,250-\$1,666)
_____ \$20,000-\$29,999	(\$1,667-\$2,499)
_____ \$30,000-\$39,999	(\$2,500-\$3,333)
_____ \$40,000-\$49,999	(\$3,334-\$4,166)
_____ \$50,000-\$59,999	(\$4,167-\$4,999)
_____ \$60,000-\$69,999	(\$5,000-\$5,833)
_____ \$70,000-\$79,999	(\$5,834-\$6,666)
_____ \$80,000 & over	(\$6,667 & over)

**Appendix B**  
Parent Consent Form

**VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY**

**Informed Consent for Participants in Research Projects Involving Human Subjects**

*Title of project:* Cross-cultural study of parents' emotion socialization and preschoolers' social competence

*Investigators:*

Sukran Kilic, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Department of Early Childhood and Education, Aksaray University, TURKEY; Visiting Scholar in Psychology, Virginia Tech, funded by the Turkish Science and Research Academy, TURKEY

Julie C. Dunsmore, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, Virginia Tech, US

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**I. Purpose of this Research:** We invite you and your child to participate in a study examining how parents think and talk about emotions and children's emotional and social competence in the preschool years (ages 4 – 5 years). We will be working with 50 families in the US and with 50 families in Turkey.

**II. Procedures:** Participating will take about an hour for you and your child. We can come to your home, or you can visit us in our family-friendly laboratory playroom, whichever you like. During most activities, we will ask you to work on questionnaires while a researcher works with your child, but we'll ask you to talk with your child for one of the activities.

First, we will ask you and your child to discuss one event that made your child happy and one event that made your child upset. Then, we'll ask you to fill out questionnaires about your child's reactions, about your reactions to typical child behaviors, and about your thoughts and feelings about emotions. While you complete the questionnaires, we will play with your child. First, we'll use puppets to see how your child identifies emotions. Then, we'll do two tasks to see how your child controls his/her expression of emotions. In the first of these, we'll ask your child to "trick" one of us by showing your child a fun video clip (a puppy playing with a flower). But, your child will be asked to use his/her face to make the researcher think s/he didn't like the video clip. In the second, we'll give your child a present to unwrap. However, instead of the cool toy your child will be expecting, inside will be a woodchip. We'll give your child just a few seconds to see how s/he hides disappointment, then we'll "remember" that this is the wrong gift, and will give your child another present to unwrap, with a nice small toy inside to keep. We'll need to videotape your conversation with your child and the tasks we do with your child so we can go back later to see how you talked with each other and how your child responded. Finally, we will ask you to give us permission to contact your child's preschool or daycare teacher, or another adult who knows your child well, to complete a questionnaire about your child's social competence.

**III. Risks:** There is minimal risk involved in this research study. Your child may be frustrated or disappointed by the tasks. For most children, receiving the nice present removes any negative mood from the previous tasks, and we will also encourage and play with your child to assure that the visit ends well.

**IV. Benefits:** No promise or guarantee of benefits has been made to encourage you to participate. Benefits may include the opportunity to think more about how you and your child talk about and manage emotions. Your child may find our activities fun. For developmental scientists, this research will contribute to understanding of how to promote children’s social competence across cultures.

**V. Extent of Anonymity or Confidentiality:** Information gathered for this study will be kept strictly confidential. Information for each family will be identified by a code number only. Information linking your and your child’s names and code number will be kept in a secure file. Videorecordings will be stored securely in our research lab. Only individuals associated with the research will have access to any of the materials. Questionnaires and videorecordings will be destroyed within 7 years after final publication of the results of this study. It is possible that the Institutional Review Board (IRB) may view this study’s collected data for auditing purposes. The IRB is responsible for the oversight of the protection of human subjects involved in research. In any study involving children, direct evidence of abuse must be reported.

**VI. Compensation:** Parents will be given a \$15 giftcard. Children will be given a small toy. Teachers or other adults who complete the social competence questionnaire will be given a \$5 giftcard.

**VII. Freedom to Withdraw:** Your and your child’s participation are strictly voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time for any reasons. Your child will be free to stop participating at any time. There is no penalty for withdrawing.

**VIII. Approval of Research:** This research project has been approved, as required, by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Research Involving Human Subjects and by the Department of Psychology at Virginia Tech.

**IX. Parent Responsibilities:** Parents are asked to complete questionnaires, to discuss two events with their child, and to give permission for the child’s teacher or another adult who knows the child well to be sent a questionnaire.

**X. Parent’s Consent to Participate:** I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent to participate in this study.

Parent participant’s name: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent participant’s  
signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



**XI. Parent's Permission for Child to Participate:** I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent for my child named below to participate in this study.

Child participant's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent participant's  
signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Contact Information:** If you have questions at any time about this study or study procedures, you may contact Dr. Julie C. Dunsmore at (540) 231 – 4201 or [jdunsmor@vt.edu](mailto:jdunsmor@vt.edu), or Dr. Sukran Kilic at [kilic.sukran@gmail.com](mailto:kilic.sukran@gmail.com). If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or that your rights as a research participant have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Dr. David W. Harrison, Chair of the Psychology Department Human Subjects Committee at [dwh@vt.edu](mailto:dwh@vt.edu) or (540) 231 – 4422 or Dr. David Moore, Chair of the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects at (540) 231-4991 or [moored@vt.edu](mailto:moored@vt.edu).

**Appendix C**  
Child Assent Form

**VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY**

**Children's Assent Form**

*Title of project:* Cross-cultural study of parents' emotion socialization and preschoolers' social competence

*Investigators:*

Sukran Kilic, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Department of Early Childhood and Education, Aksaray University, TURKEY; Visiting Scholar in Psychology, Virginia Tech, funded by the Turkish Science and Research Academy, TURKEY

Julie C. Dunsmore, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, Virginia Tech, US

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***I. Explanation of Research to Child***

We're going to play some games today. You'll get to talk with your mom/dad, see some puppet stories, watch a cute video and open a present.

***II. Asking for Child's Verbal Assent***

Are you ready to play? Shall we get ready?

***III. Witness Affirmation***

The child verbally agreed to participate in this research study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Child's name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of witness

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Appendix D**  
Indirect Communication Coding Scheme

**Indirect Communication Illocution Coding**  
*Adapted from Searle (1976)*

*Instructions:* code each transcript separately by event (+/-), the unit of coding for this scheme is subject-verb phrases

- Remember that subject-verb phrases can stand alone. For example, “You go into Name’s room” would stand alone, whereas “When you go into Name’s room” would not.
- Trust the punctuation. Periods and question marks should be treated differently than commas.
- Any phrases that don’t stand alone are grouped with the subject-verb phrase that follows them.
- Use grammatical rules when breaking up subject-verb phrases, not the meaning of the phrase.
- Special rules:
  - If the same word or sound is repeated, keep together as one phrase (i.e., “no no no” would be one phrase, as would “hmm, hmmm”)
  - If a word or sound seems to be qualifying a phrase, keep together as one phrase (i.e., “Well, we saw you” would be one phrase, whereas “Yeah, that’s pretty funny” would be two phrases – “yeah” and “that’s pretty funny”)
  - If a word or sound occurs at the end of a phrase, and the speaker continues right away into another phrase, keep the first phrase together (i.e., “I took away your nail polish, right? Do you know why?” – “I took away your nail polish, right” would be one phrase. Likewise, “He got mad, didn’t he?” would be one phrase, as would “He was sad, yeah.”)
  - If the speaker uses the other person’s name to start a phrase, consider that an attention-getter and separate from the rest of the phrase (i.e., “Name, put the pen down” would be two phrases – “Name” and “put the pen down”)
  - If the speaker uses the other person’s name to end a phrase, the name is not being used to get attention and therefore should be kept with the rest of the phrase (i.e., “I agree, Name” would be one phrase)
- Categorize each subject-verb phrase for both **function** (what the purpose of the subject-verb phrase is, what it is intended to do) and **form** (the structure of the subject-verb phrase), using one of the following categories:
  - Representatives (R), directives (Di), commissives (C), expressives (Ex), declaratives (De), questions/comments about the event (Q)
  - For form only, there is an extra category: QR (question redressive)
  - Each category is explained in the following pages
- Special rules:
  - Feedback and backchanneling (ex: “that makes sense”, “mhmm, yeah”) = expressive function and form
  - No questions can be representatives unless there is a tag (“, right?”)
  - Q (function) and Q (form) are a match and therefore not indirect, but Q (function) and QR (form) are not a match, indicating indirectness

- Speaking in 3<sup>rd</sup> person (“that makes mommy happy”) should be coded as expressive function in representative form
- Directives (“sit up”) can be indirect if they are in question form (“can you please sit up?”)
- Directives can also be in the form of an expressive (“I want to talk about \_\_\_\_,” let’s talk about \_\_”) or in the form of a representative (“they want us to talk about \_\_”)

### **Representatives (R)**

- Commits the speaker (parent) to the truth of the statement
- Can be classified as true or false

Examples:

- P: There were over 100 kids at the park.
- P: You kicked her.
- P: You said your stomach hurt, huh? (Indirect, Q form)

### **Directives (Di)**

- Attempts by the speaker (parent) to get the listener (child) to try and do something
- Causes the listener (child) to take a particular action

Examples:

- P: Stop doing that.
- P: Sit down.
- P: Can you stop doing that? (Indirect, Q form)

### **Commissives (C)**

- Commits the speaker (parent) to some future action

Examples:

- P: Maybe I’ll get you a new toy tomorrow.
- P: You know I’ll always be here for you.
- P: I can’t talk to you anymore until you sit. (Indirect, Di function)

### **Expressives (Ex)**

- Expresses speaker’s (parent’s) attitudes OR emotions
- Comments about the event to the child

Examples:

- P: Thank you honey.

- P: I'm really sorry that you were scared.
- P: Oh okay, that makes sense.
- P: You know what I noticed? (Indirect, QR form)

### **Declaratives (De)**

- Alter/change the status or condition of the object(s) referred to

#### Example:

- P: You're grounded.

### **Questions (Q)**

- Added into the scheme to fit the data and the task used to produce it
- Speaker (parent) is asking about the assigned event or asking a question in general

#### Examples:

- P: Did you have fun?

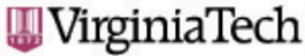
### **Questions about event redressive (QR)**

- Added into the scheme to fit the data and the task used to produce it
- Used for **FORM ONLY**
- Speaker (parent) is asking about the assigned event (or asking a question in general), giving information, or commenting about the event to the listener (child)
- Redressive in that these subject-verb phrases are mitigated

#### Examples:

- P: Could you tell me if you liked the trip? (Indirect, QR form)
  - P: Did you like the trip? (Q)
- P: Please tell me about the trip ok. (Indirect, QR form)
  - P: Tell me about the trip. (Q)

## Appendix E IRB Approval Letter



Office of Research Compliance  
Institutional Review Board  
North End Center, Suite 4120, Virginia Tech  
300 Turner Street NW  
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061  
540/231-4606 Fax 540/231-0959  
email [irb@vt.edu](mailto:irb@vt.edu)  
website <http://www.irb.vt.edu>

### MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** March 22, 2016  
**TO:** Julie C Dunsmore, Sukran Kilic, Erika Hernandez  
**FROM:** Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires January 29, 2021)  
**PROTOCOL TITLE:** Cross-cultural study of parents' emotion socialization and preschoolers' social competence  
**IRB NUMBER:** 14-1146

Effective March 22, 2016, the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chair, David M Moore, approved the Amendment request for the above-mentioned research protocol.

This approval provides permission to begin the human subject activities outlined in the IRB-approved protocol and supporting documents.

Plans to deviate from the approved protocol and/or supporting documents must be submitted to the IRB as an amendment request and approved by the IRB prior to the implementation of any changes, regardless of how minor, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Report within 5 business days to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at:

<http://www.irb.vt.edu/pages/responsibilities.htm>

(Please review responsibilities before the commencement of your research.)

### PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Approved As: **Expedited, under 45 CFR 46.110 category(ies) 5,6,7**  
Protocol Approval Date: **November 21, 2015**  
Protocol Expiration Date: **November 20, 2016**  
Continuing Review Due Date\*: **November 6, 2016**

\*Date a Continuing Review application is due to the IRB office if human subject activities covered under this protocol, including data analysis, are to continue beyond the Protocol Expiration Date.

### FEDERALLY FUNDED RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS:

Per federal regulations, 45 CFR 46.103(f), the IRB is required to compare all federally funded grant proposals/work statements to the IRB protocol(s) which cover the human research activities included in the proposal / work statement before funds are released. Note that this requirement does not apply to Exempt and Interim IRB protocols, or grants for which VT is not the primary awardee.

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this IRB protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this IRB protocol, if required.

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Date*	OSP Number	Sponsor	Grant Comparison Conducted?

\* Date this proposal number was compared, assessed as not requiring comparison, or comparison information was revised.

If this IRB protocol is to cover any other grant proposals, please contact the IRB office (irbadmin@vt.edu) immediately.