



Social domain theory and children's temperament: Study of parental discipline and children's externalizing symptoms

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Background

- Early childhood is a vulnerable developmental period for children's exposure to harsh discipline (Edwards & Lui, 2002). In particular, physical discipline have been shown to be associated with more aggression and more externalizing problems (Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016).
- Much of the work in this area has not considered the context within which harsh discipline may occur and the differential implications for development.
- Social domain theory (SDT; Smetana, 1984) proposes that different domains of socialization may have distinct functions for child development including: moral, conventional (rules and norms), and prudential (safety) contexts.
- The impact of parental harsh discipline in response to child transgressions within these domains and development in early child development is relatively unknown.
- Finally, it has been theorized that children with a difficult temperament appear to be more heavily influenced by the environment they are raised in (Belsky, Bakermans-Kranenburg, & van IJzendoorn, 2005).
- The present study examined:
 - The associations between parental discipline practices within these three domains and children's externalizing behaviors.
 - The differential impact of mother's and father's discipline across domains on children's externalizing symptomatology
 - Whether negative emotionality moderates the relationship between mothers and fathers discipline style and children's externalizing behavior.

Participants

- 209 mothers, fathers, and their 3 year old children (43.8% male, 56.2% female).
- Families reside in Western N.Y. region.
- White: 53.4%, Black: 23.6%, Asian: 1.9%, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander: 0.5%, Other 20.6%; Hispanic or Latino: 17.8%
- <23,000: 26.8%, 23,000-75,000: 40.2%, >75,000: 32.6%, & not reported: 0.4%

Table 1. Hierarchical path models examining main effects of parenting domains on children's externalizing and the moderating effects of child temperament.

Independent Variables	β	B	SE	p-value
Conventional Domain				
Child Gender → Child Externalizing	.20*	.08	.03	.01
Child Ethnicity → Child Externalizing	-.05	-.02	.03	.42
Father Use of Spanking → Child Externalizing	.17*	.06	.02	.02
Father Use of Reasoning → Child Externalizing	-.02	-.01	.02	.79
Mother Use of Spanking → Child Externalizing	.15*	.05	.02	.04
Mother Use of Reasoning → Child Externalizing	-.01	-.01	.02	.87
Moral Domain				
Child Gender → Child Externalizing	.22*	.09	.03	.007
Child Ethnicity → Child Externalizing	-.09	-.03	.03	.20
Father Use of Spanking → Child Externalizing	.04	.01	.02	.53
Father Use of Reasoning → Child Externalizing	.01	.01	.02	.94
Mother Use of Spanking → Child Externalizing	.34*	.08	.02	.001
Mother Use of Reasoning → Child Externalizing	.02	.01	.02	.80
Prudential Domain				
Child Gender → Child Externalizing	.20*	.08	.03	.002
Child Ethnicity → Child Externalizing	-.08	-.03	.03	.24
Father Use of Spanking → Child Externalizing	.10	.02	.02	.14
Father Use of Reasoning → Child Externalizing	-.04	-.01	.02	.53
Mother Use of Spanking → Child Externalizing	.27*	.05	.01	.001
Mother Use of Reasoning → Child Externalizing	-.01	.01	.03	.99
Temperament x Conventional Domain Moderation Model				
Mother Use of Spanking → Child Externalizing	.21	.07	.02	.002
Temperament → Child Externalizing	.30	.08	.02	.001
Temperament x Mother Use of Spanking → Child Externalizing	-.15	-.05	.02	.02
Temperament x Moral Domain Moderation Model				
Mother Use of Spanking → Child Externalizing	.30	.07	.02	.001
Temperament → Child Externalizing	.27	.07	.02	.001
Temperament x Mother Use of Spanking → Child Externalizing	-.12	-.04	.02	.05
Temperament x Prudential Domain Moderation Model				
Mother Use of Spanking → Child Externalizing	.28	.05	.01	.001
Temperament → Child Externalizing	.27	.07	.02	.001
Temperament x Mother Use of Spanking → Child Externalizing	-.04	-.01	.02	.51

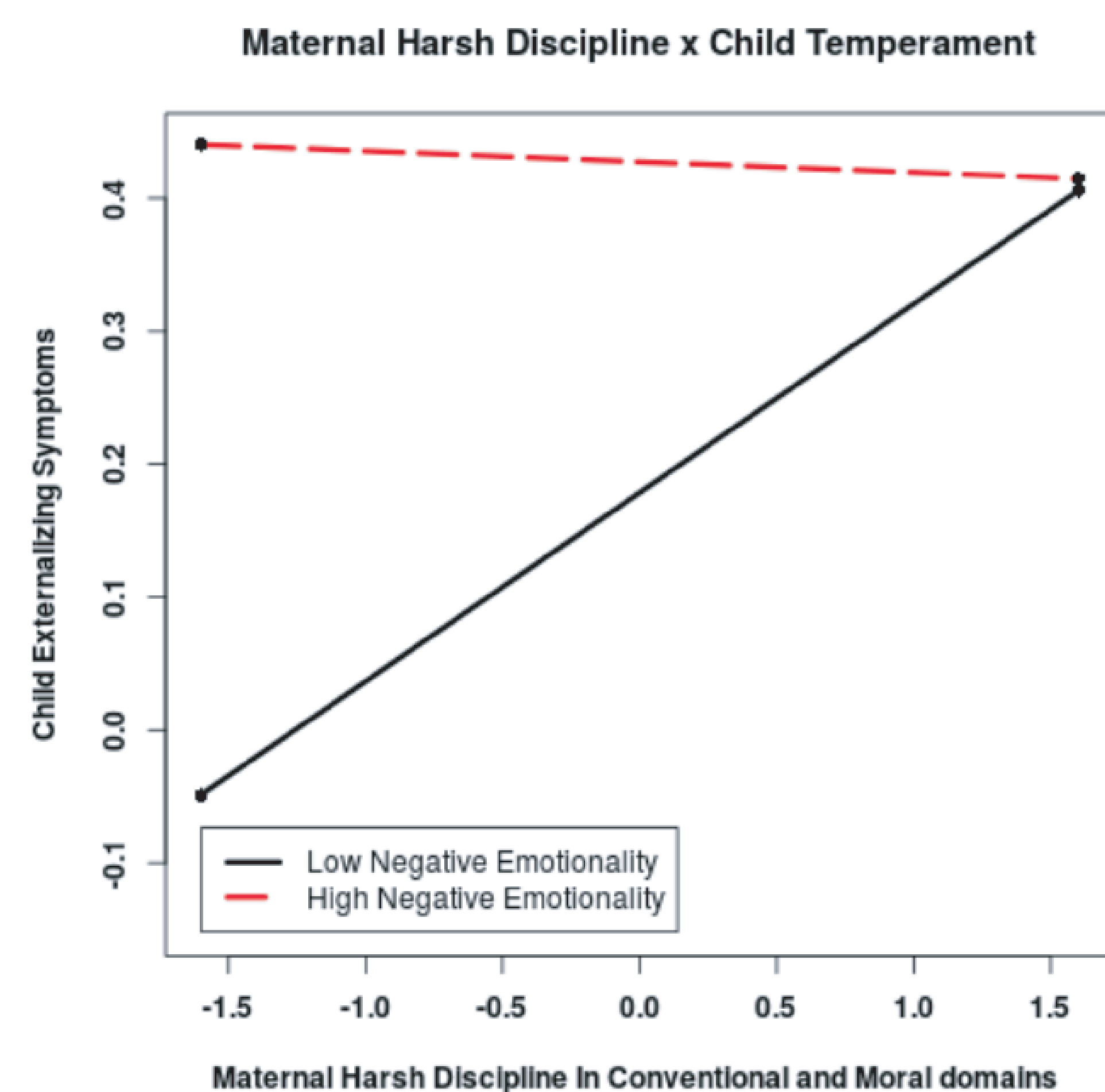


Figure 1. Plot of significant Parenting Domain x Child Temperament interactions on Child Externalizing. Solid lines denote significant simple slopes. Dotted lines denote non-significant simple slopes. Simple slopes are significant at $p < .01$.

Method

- **Health Behavior Questionnaire (HBQ) - oppositional defiant, conduct problems, & overt hostility subscales.**
60-item self-administered parent measure used to assess child externalizing behaviors that uses a 3 point Likert scale. *Mothers and fathers completed.*
- **Parenting Dimensions Inventory (PDI).**
Three scenarios are presented which are consistent with the domains of SDT. Parents were asked to indicate on a 6 point Likert scale how often they used physical punishment or reasoning discipline with their child. *Mothers and fathers completed.*
- **Child Behavior Questionnaire (CBQ) - anger/frustration, impulsivity, and approach/positive avoidance subscales.**
37-item self-administered parent measure rated using a 7-point Likert scale. Used to assess child temperament. *Only mothers completed.*

Results

- Path analysis was used to analyze our models (Table 1). Child demographics were included as covariates.
- Results suggested that mother's use of spanking was associated with child externalizing across all three domains while her use of reasoning/reminding discipline was not.
- Father's use of spanking was only associated with child externalizing for the conventional domain.
- Findings suggest that maternal use of harsh discipline may be particularly associated with children's externalizing symptoms early in life.
- There was a significant interaction effect of child negative emotionality for mothers between both spanking in conventional and moral domains on children's externalizing symptoms.
- No other interaction effects for mothers or fathers were significant.
- Post-hoc simple slope analyses revealed that children low in negative emotionality experienced increased externalizing symptoms as maternal use of spanking increased (Figure 1).

Conclusions

- Findings suggest that maternal use of harsh discipline may have a stronger effect on children's externalizing symptoms when compared with fathers.
- The domain of discipline may impact these associations as well as child negative emotionality.



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