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Emotion Regulation and Resilience in Parent-Adolescent Interactions Among Families of
Harmful versus Non-harmful Parental Alcohol Use

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Abstract

This study applied emotion regulation theory to examine features of parental communication that predict possible markers of adolescent resilience in families of harmful versus non-harmful parental alcohol use. Parent-adolescent dyads (30 dyads with harmful parental alcohol use, 30 dyads with non-harmful parental alcohol use) participated in video-taped interactions rated for parents' emotion coaching and emotion dismissing communication and adolescents' emotion regulation and behavioral impulsivity. Emotion coaching communication was positively associated with adolescent emotion regulation and behavioral impulsivity. Emotion dismissing communication was only positively associated with adolescent behavioral impulsivity. Adolescents in families of harmful alcohol use demonstrated more impulsivity compared to their counterparts but also showed more emotion regulation in the presence of emotion dismissing communication. Findings suggest that the dimensions of parental communication are uniquely associated with potential markers of adolescent resilience. For families of harmful parental alcohol use, results point to a need for greater consistency in parental communication behavior and efficacy in modeling desired expressions of emotions in an effort to foster adolescent resilience.

Keywords: Parental communication, Resilience, Emotion regulation, Behavioral impulsivity, Harmful alcohol use

Emotion Regulation and Resilience in Parent-Adolescent Interactions Among Families of
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Resilience refers to the achievement of positive outcomes and the avoidance of negative outcomes in response to adversity (Zatura, Hall, & Murray, 2010). Resilience is a characteristic that children and adolescents need to develop to help them cope with and respond to hardships (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005). Although some perspectives view resilience as a trait-like characteristic that resilient individuals have since birth (Lucken & Gress, 2010), others view resilience as a quality or skill that can be cultivated and accumulated based on interpersonal experiences and interactions (Buzzanell, 2010). In other words, interpersonal communication behavior can both shape and reflect individual qualities of resilience. Among the factors that contribute to the development of resilience, features of parent-child interaction can be especially influential (Winslow, Sandler, & Wolchik, 2005). Interactions between parents and children establish norms for how to manage emotion and demonstrate social competence (Eisenberg, Spinrad, & Eggum, 2010; Gottman, Katz, & Hooven, 1997), offering a benchmark for establishing resilient responses to interpersonal circumstances. Thus, this study considers how features of parental communication may encourage or undermine the development of resilience in adolescents.

We draw on Gottman's (2001) emotion regulation theory to identify features of parental communication that may be influential in cultivating children's resilience. The theory identifies emotion coaching and emotion dismissing behavior as features of parental communication that can help or hinder children's ability to recognize and respond appropriately to emotional experiences (Gottman et al., 1997). Given that resilience is often reflected in individuals' ability to adapt to their circumstances, remain efficacious in the face of hardships, strive for optimism,

and manage their reactions to undesirable conditions (Werner & Smith, 1992), parental communication that assists children in developing their emotional intelligence can contribute to greater resilience. A primary goal of this study, then, is to examine how parents' emotion coaching and emotion dismissing behavior correspond with potential emotional and behavioral markers of resilience in adolescents during interaction. Thus, this study makes a unique contribution by demonstrating the ways in which resilience is modeled and enacted in interpersonal communication behavior, rather than treating resilience as a cognitive appraisal of one's efficacy to overcome adversity.

A second goal of this study is to compare parental communication dynamics and adolescent resilience in families of harmful and non-harmful parental alcohol use. Implicit in the concept of resilience is the presence of adverse circumstances that must be overcome. Harmful parental alcohol use represents a significant source of adversity for many families (Grant, 2000), with approximately 8.3 million children exposed to harmful alcohol use by a parent (SAMSHA, 2009). The general communicative environment in families of harmful parental alcohol use can be characterized by inconsistencies, conflict, and neglect, which are associated with emotional and behavioral challenges for children (Schade, 2006). Offspring of parents that harmfully consume alcohol tend to display lower self-esteem, higher levels of anxiety, and increased rates of depression when compared to children who were not exposed to harmful parental drinking (Rangarajan & Kelly, 2006). Furthermore, children growing up among harmful parental alcohol consumption are more likely to harmfully consume substances themselves (Arria, Mericle, Meyers, & Winters, 2012). Given the potential consequences for offspring who are exposed to harmful parental alcohol consumption, the focus of this study has practical applications for

encouraging parental communication behaviors that can help promote children's resilience in this family environment.

In the following sections, we describe resilience as a personal quality that is cultivated through and manifest in communication behavior and we point to the features of parental communication described in emotion regulation theory as mechanisms for modeling and developing adolescent resilience. Then, we describe the results of an interactive study that examined features of parental communication and potential indicators of adolescent resilience in parent-adolescent dyads from families with harmful and non-harmful parental alcohol use. Finally, we discuss our findings in terms of their contributions to the literature on communication and resilience and their practical applications for families.

Features of Resilience

Although all children are exposed to some level of adversity, those who experience chronic stressors are the most prone to deleterious outcomes. Various protective factors help children to overcome their difficult circumstances, and children who are better at navigating unfavorable situations are more likely to avoid negative outcomes (Lansford et al., 2006). *Resilience* refers to successful adaptation in response to an adverse environment (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000) and can be reflected in two developmental qualities: emotion regulation and behavioral impulsivity. These potential indicators of resilience are interrelated in the process of *self-regulation*, which reflects individuals' sense-making activity in terms of the actions they take and how they react to external stimuli (Carver & Scheier, 2011). Emotion regulation and behavioral impulsivity were chosen as potential indicators of resilience in this context because they have observable manifestations in communication behavior. The following

sections describe these possible markers of resilience and explore how families with harmful parental alcohol use may shape a child's propensity for each mechanism of resilience.

Emotion Regulation as a Facet of Resilience

One possible indicator of children's resilience is reflected in their ability to manage emotions. *Emotion regulation* refers to the ability to control one's emotional arousal and navigate through positive and negative affect (Ochsner & Gross, 2005). Regulation strategies include reassessing a situation, distracting one's self from the situation, suppressing emotion, and distancing from the situation (Ochsner, Silvers, & Buhle, 2012). Literature on emotion regulation is primarily focused on children and adolescents, because this is a period when temperament, brain development, abstract thinking, and social networks are developing, thereby laying the groundwork for unique differences in emotion regulation that continue into adulthood (Thompson & Meyer, 2006). The way that parents express their own affect and respond to children's expressions of affect demonstrates to children how they should manage and internalize emotions (Straussner & Fewell, 2011). A supportive and sympathetic response from parents during a child's expression of emotion allows the child to successfully identify and address their emotion during a social episode (Gross & Thompson, 2006). Parents who respond to their child's emotion in a derogatory way often stimulate a child's negative adaptation and poor regulatory behavior (Denham, 1998).

In families characterized by emotional distress, such as families of harmful parental alcohol use, parents may struggle to demonstrate appropriate emotions or to coach their children to maintain control over their own feelings. A common trait in families of harmful parental alcohol use is manipulated or inconsistent communication, making it difficult for children to interpret how to appropriately perceive and respond to interpersonal messages (Fonagy, Gergely,

Jurist, & Target, 2002). Moreover, low emotional intelligence and poor emotion regulation can have negative consequences for a child's future relationships (Fonagy et al., 2002). Thus, early exposure to a distressed family environment can have lasting effects on emotion regulation ability.

Behavioral Impulsivity as a Facet of Resilience

A second possible marker of adolescent resilience that is reflected in communication is behavioral impulsivity. *Impulsivity* refers to a lack of inhibition regardless of the consequences, which is a trait related to the entire spectrum of externalizing behaviors (DeYoung, 2011; Kreuger et al., 2002). *Externalizing behaviors* encompass an array of outwardly motivated behavioral issues, including aggression, delinquency, inattention, interpersonal problems, and learning deficiencies (Bezdjian, Baker, Lozano, & Raine, 2009). Individuals who are capable of controlling their behavior are viewed as more resilient because they can positively adjust to their environment and demonstrate resourceful adaptation (Eisenberg & Spinrad, 2004). Parents help children develop behavioral regulation by modeling appropriate behavior, praising desirable behavior, and disciplining unwanted behavior (Calkins, 1994). A lack of parental responsiveness is associated with increased externalizing problems as children search for ways to gain parental attention and affection (Loukas, Fitzgerald, Zucker, & von Eye, 2001).

Early exposure to severe stressors, such as parental neglect and substance abuse, is associated with adverse behavioral outcomes (Middlebrooks & Audage, 2008). In families of harmful parental alcohol use, parents may be less involved and fail to enact discipline, thereby perpetuating the likelihood for negative behavioral outcomes (Straussner & Fewell, 2011). Children in families of harmful parental alcohol use also commonly display underdeveloped emotional and attentional regulatory abilities, resulting in an increase in behavioral impulsivity

(Park & Schepp, 2014). Thus, the conditions in families of harmful parental alcohol use have the potential to influence the adaptive or maladaptive impulses of children.

Emotion Regulation Theory

One theoretical perspective that provides insight into the parental communication behaviors that can promote or undermine adolescents' communicated resilience is Gottman's (2001) emotion regulation theory. This theory focuses on the emotional-social development of children via parent-child interaction and suggests that the communication behaviors of parents or primary caregivers is instrumental for providing a model of appropriate emotional expression (Cupach & Olson, 2006; Gottman, 2001). The theory highlights two ways that parents might address children's emotional experiences during interaction: emotion coaching communication and emotion dismissing communication. Thus, we nominate emotion coaching and emotion dismissing as two features of parental communication that are associated with emotion regulation and behavioral impulsivity. The following sections define these features of parental communication and position them as predictors of adolescents' emotion regulation and behavioral impulsivity.

Emotion Coaching Communication as a Predictor of Adolescent Resilience

Emotion coaching involves expressions of empathy and views the communication of emotion as an opportunity for parents to teach their children about appropriate and inappropriate emotional reactions. Emotion coaching parents often adopt *scaffolding/praising behaviors*, which reflect an engaged and warm teaching style between parent and child that utilizes structure when offering support (Gottman et al., 1997). Children growing up in an emotion coaching environment demonstrate prosocial skills, academic competence, attentiveness, and good health (Gottman et al., 1997).

Children are more capable of managing their emotions when exposed to emotion coaching parenting. Children demonstrate successful emotion regulation when parents express acceptance of emotions and take a teaching approach to managing emotion (Eisenberg et al., 2010). Research on mothers who use assertive power strategies to address their child's emotions found a decrease in children's patience for delay of gratification, whereas parents who attempted to teach their child about emotions by using a balance of control and empathy techniques found an increase in children's patience (Houck & Lecuyer-Maus, 2004). Moreover, adolescents who have at least one parent or primary caregiver that encourages open communication tend to adjust more successfully when exposed to adverse situations (Rangarajan & Kelly, 2006). Taken together, these findings endorse the following hypothesis:

H1: Parents' emotion coaching behavior is positively associated with adolescents' emotion regulation.

A parent's emotion coaching can also have implications for adolescents' behavioral impulsivity. Emotion coaching promotes secure attachment bonds between parent and child (Waters et al., 2010), which promotes effective self-regulation (Gilliom, Shaw, Beck, Schonberg, & Lukon, 2002). Children with emotion coaching parents also demonstrate less aggression and fewer behavioral problems, even when exposed to high levels of conflict (Gottman, Katz, & Hooven, 1996). Moreover, children tend to model the behavior of their parents (Denham, 1998); therefore, exposure to positive, emotionally stable interactions may reduce the likelihood for children to display externalizing and impulsive behavior. Following this reasoning, we propose the following hypothesis:

H2: Parents' emotion coaching behavior is negatively associated with adolescents' behavioral impulsivity.

One question guiding this study is whether the association between emotion coaching communication and proposed interactive markers of adolescent resilience is moderated by the presence of harmful parental alcohol use in the family. There is evidence to suggest that families with harmful parental alcohol use tend to pay less attention to the emotional needs of children and demonstrate more emotion dismissing communication behavior (Lam et al., 2007). Thus, it is possible that the effect of emotion coaching behavior is stronger in families of harmful parental alcohol use because children in those families may not be accustomed to that level of involvement from their parents. Conversely, children may be more reactive to parents who tell them how to feel or how to properly express emotion if they sense that parents with harmful alcohol use are inconsistent themselves in this regard. Given that individuals from families of harmful parental alcohol use express fewer feelings and have less affection for other family members (Jones & Houts, 1992), parents who suddenly express interest in emotions and expect the same of the adolescent may be perceived as a double standard. In turn, children may react more negatively. Therefore, we present the following research question:

RQ1: To what extent does the presence of harmful parental alcohol use in a family moderate the associations between emotion coaching communication and adolescent's emotion regulation and behavioral impulsivity?

Emotion Dismissing Communication as a Predictor of Adolescent Resilience

In contrast to emotion coaching behavior, *emotion dismissing behavior* encompasses parental communication that criticizes or scolds children for their experience and expression of emotion. Emotion dismissing parents' employ *derogatory behaviors*, including criticism, ridicule, and disparagement (Cupach & Olson, 2006). Children with emotion dismissing parents struggle to effectively manage emotions, resulting in outbursts of verbal and physical aggression

(Cupach & Olson, 2006). In addition, children exposed to emotion dismissing communication demonstrate poorer physical health, lower academic scores, and decreased emotion regulation (Lunkenheimer, Shields, & Cortina, 2007).

Children exposed to emotion dismissing parental communication often demonstrate poor emotion regulation (Gottman et al., 1996). Parents who discourage children's negative emotions may inhibit healthy emotional development and hinder self-regulation (Tajalli & Ardalán, 2010). Since resilience is influenced by protective factors in one's environment, such as supportive communication (Velleman & Templeton, 2007), an emotion dismissing parent may negatively affect a child's ability to regulate emotion and develop resilience. Thus, we make the following prediction:

H3: Parents' emotion dismissing behavior is negatively associated with adolescents' emotion regulation.

In addition, exposure to emotion dismissing communication may increase the likelihood for externalizing behavior problems. Emotion dismissing parents exhibit frustration or avoidance when children express negative emotions (Cupach & Olson, 2006). When parents display more anger in their communication, children exhibit more externalizing behaviors as they attempt to mirror their parents' behaviors (Denham et al., 2000). Similarly, adolescents demonstrate an increase in negative behaviors when parents fail to acknowledge children's expression of negative emotion (Eisenberg, Fabes, & Murphy, 1996). Given that children tend to act out when their parents attempt to suppress emotional expression, emotion dismissing behavior is likely associated with increased behavioral impulsivity. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Parents' emotion dismissing behavior is positively associated with adolescents' behavioral impulsivity.

Again, we are interested in understanding if the effects of emotion dismissing communication are moderated by a parent's alcohol use. On one hand, if parents in families with harmful alcohol use tend to enact more emotion dismissing behaviors, children may become desensitized to this type of parenting and may be less likely to act out in response to it. On the other hand, children may react more intensely to parents' dismissiveness as a form of reactance to being told that their feelings are not important. Furthermore, the general nature of communication often documented in families of harmful parental alcohol use suggests there may be minimal instruction on how to properly manage emotions and behave in an appropriate manner, which might result in children acting out more than children of parents' with non-harmful alcohol use (Hussong & Chassin, 1997). Thus, the following research question is presented:

RQ2: To what extent does the presence of harmful parental alcohol use in a family moderate the associations between emotion dismissing communication and adolescent's emotion regulation and behavioral impulsivity?

Method

This study was part of a larger project that included self-report, observational, and physiological measures. This paper focused on the observational aspects of the study for two reasons. First, we wanted to examine the communicative manifestations of adolescents' emotion regulation and behavioral impulsivity as communicated features of resilience, as well as parents' interpersonal enactment of emotion coaching and dismissing behavior in conversation. Second,

we wanted to avoid potential social desirability bias in adolescents' self-reports of their own resilience and in parents' self-reports of their tendency to engage in emotion focused parenting.

Participants in this study were 60 parent-adolescent dyads, 30 dyads from families with non-harmful parental alcohol use and 30 dyads from families with harmful parental alcohol use. Announcements were posted in various social media platforms to recruit dyads from families of non-harmful parental alcohol use. To obtain the sample from families of harmful parental alcohol use, several organizations and agencies that work with high risk families (e.g., Al-Anon World Services, National Council on Family Relations, and the Middlesex County Coalition for Healthy Communities) announced our study to members in New Jersey, Texas, and California.

Eligibility criteria for both family types required that (a) adolescent participants were between the ages of 12 and 19 years old; (b) parents were either married or cohabiting, or unmarried with shared custody and at least monthly visitation with the noncustodial parent; (c) both members of the dyad were proficient in English; and (d) the adolescent did not take medication for any emotional or psychological disorders. In addition, criteria for families of harmful parental alcohol use required at least one parent to identify as having an alcohol use disorder (AUD), assessed via a screening questionnaire. The AUD screening questionnaire was informed by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) problem drinking guidelines, as well as the criteria outlined in the current version of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) pertaining to AUD. We incorporated both assessments in order to confirm the existence of harmful parental alcohol consumption. The first portion of the questionnaire asked about drinking behavior based on the average number of days per week alcohol was consumed and the average number of drinks consumed per sitting for each parent (NIAAA, 2015). An AUD was diagnosed for males who consumed more than 14 drinks

per week and for females who consumed more than 7 drinks per week per NIAAA guidelines.

The second part of the questionnaire listed 11 AUD related symptoms. Individuals who identified with 2 or more symptoms indicate the presence of an AUD (DSM-V; NIAAA, 2015).

Sample

The adolescent sample included 24 males (40%) and 35 females (58.3%), and one nonresponse. Adolescents ranged in age from 12 to 19 years of age, with a mean age of 14.8 years ($SD = 1.93$). Adolescents were Caucasian (70%), African American (10%), Hispanic/Latino (6.7%), Asian (1.7%), Native American (1.7%), and Other (6.7%), with two participants not responding (3.3%).

Parents participating in the study included 14 males (23.3%) and 45 females (75%), with one nonresponse. Parents ranged in age from 27 to 63, with a mean age of 46.62 years ($SD = 7.76$). Parents were Caucasian (80%), African American (10%), Hispanic/Latino (8.3%), and Indian (1.7%). Most participants were in a committed relationship with the child's other parent (85%), with 3.3% dating but not married, 80% married, 3.3% in a common law marriage, and 13.3% declining to report. Participants who were not romantically involved with the child's other parent (15%) reported that they were separated (37.5%), divorced (37.5%), widowed (12.5%), or never had a committed relationship (12.5%).

In the dyads from families with harmful parental alcohol use, both parents had an alcohol use disorder in 11 dyads, the participating parent had an alcohol use disorder in 17 dyads, and the non-participating parent had an alcohol use disorder in 13 dyads.¹ The sample of parents identified as harmfully consuming alcohol included 16 females and 25 males.

Procedures

We invited parent-adolescent dyads to a campus interaction lab to participate in the study. Upon arrival, the parent gave consent for him/herself and the adolescent to participate in the study. Adolescents also gave their own assent to participate. After completing consent forms the parent and adolescent each completed a pre-interaction questionnaire.

Following procedures outlined by McLaren and Pederson (2014), adolescents were also directed to write down three happy events and three unhappy events they had recently experienced on two sets of three notecards. This prompt was used to elicit topics of an emotional nature for a subsequent video recorded interaction with their parent. Examples of happy events included “when I went back to school and saw my friends again” and “I felt happy when I went to Al-Anon teen therapy group.” Unhappy event examples included “my sister made me late for an important event so she could make hers” and “when my dad left.” Next, adolescents were instructed to choose one event from each category (happy and unhappy) that they would feel comfortable discussing with their parent. We sought to focus the conversations on positive and negative emotional experiences so that the parents would have an opportunity to demonstrate emotion coaching or emotion dismissing behavior in the interaction.

We then invited the parent-adolescent dyad to sit down in a separate room equipped for video recording and asked them to discuss one of the two events selected by the adolescent for five minutes.² Afterward, the parent and adolescent were asked to complete a post-interaction questionnaire about their perceptions of the interaction. Dyads repeated this procedure for the second topic selected by the adolescent for interaction. To avoid ordering effects, we randomized the order of the happy and unhappy event conversations. After the second conversation and questionnaire, the dyads were debriefed and the parent and adolescent each received a \$50 VISA gift card. Study procedures took approximately two hours.

Rating Procedures

The first author trained two teams of four undergraduate research assistants to rate the conversations for parents' emotion coaching and emotion dismissing communication, and for adolescent emotion regulation and behavioral impulsivity. The research team was blind to which dyads were from families of harmful versus non-harmful parental alcohol use. The research team received training to apply the rating scheme for each variable and practiced rating procedures as a group on several interaction examples prior to beginning their independent rating. Team members independently rated 10 sets of interactions at a time. After completing ratings for each batch of interactions, the research team met with the first author to check reliability and collectively review more sample interactions to prevent coder drift. Consistency-based intraclass correlation coefficients (ICC) were used to assess reliability, with the threshold for acceptable reliability set at $ICC > .60$ (Courtright, 2014).

Raters used the Family Emotional Communication Scoring System to evaluate emotion coaching and emotion dismissing communication (Shields, Lunkenheimer, & Reed-Twiss, 2002). Emotion coaching communication refers to statements or questions that validate, describe, and/or aim to solve the adolescent's emotions. Examples of emotion coaching statements are "*Can you think of anything that would have made you feel better?*" and "*I could tell you were mad because you walked away.*" A dismissing parenting style may demonstrate both verbal and nonverbal communication that invalidated, criticized, and/or disregarded the adolescent's emotions. Emotion dismissing statements might include "*It wasn't anything to get upset over*" or "*Are you done acting this way?*" The raters were directed to rate the recordings based on a 5-point scale (1 = *not at all emotion coaching/dismissing*, 5 = *completely emotion coaching/dismissing*) at 30-second intervals.³ To create a composite variable based on the

ratings, we summed the scores for all raters for each 30-second interval of the interaction and then summed those scores for all 10 intervals in the interaction. The research team demonstrated acceptable reliability for parents' emotion coaching behavior ($ICC = .71$, $M = 141.61$, $SD = 37.62$) and emotion dismissing behavior ($ICC = .79$, $M = 92.25$, $SD = 30.41$).

The research team also rated the interactions for communicative markers of emotion regulation and behavioral impulsivity on the part of the adolescent. A rating scale was developed to evaluate the extent to which the adolescent demonstrated control over their emotional expressions. For each 30-second interval of interaction, raters evaluated the degree of emotion regulation on a 5-point scale (1 = *poor emotion regulation*, 5 = *excellent emotion regulation*). Poor emotion regulation was manifest in emotional expressions that were situationally and contextually inappropriate, including demonstrations of withdrawal, difficulty empathizing, and impatience. Excellent emotion regulation was manifest in adolescent behaviors that reflected a degree of comfort demonstrating situationally and contextually appropriate emotions, including engagement and the ability to describe emotions. Again, ratings were summed across all intervals of interactions and across all raters to achieve composite scores for each interaction. Raters were reliable in assessing adolescent emotion regulation ($ICC = .87$, $M = 148.40$, $SD = 36.64$).

The rating scheme for behavioral impulsivity was created based on an adapted version of the Revised Edition of the School Observation Rating System, which is designed to measure appropriate or inappropriate behavior (REDSOCS; Jacobs et al., 2000). For each 30-second interval of interaction, raters evaluated the adolescent's behavior during that time as appropriate or inappropriate to the situation (1 = *appropriate behavior*, 5 = *inappropriate behavior*). Behaviors that were considered appropriate to the interactions included effective turn-taking,

appropriate volume of speech, and consistent eye contact. Behaviors that were considered inappropriate to the interaction included expressions of aggression and impulsiveness, such as back-talk, interrupting, shouting, or being distracted. After summing ratings across all raters and all intervals of the interaction, raters demonstrated high reliability in their assessment of adolescent behavioral impulsivity ($ICC = .85$, $M = 86.47$, $SD = 33.13$).

Results

Preliminary Results

As a preliminary step, bivariate correlations were calculated for families of harmful and non-harmful alcohol use (see Table 1). In both types of families, emotion coaching was positively associated with adolescent emotion regulation during the unhappy interaction and emotion dismissing communication was positively associated with behavioral impulsivity during the unhappy interaction. For families of harmful alcohol use, emotion dismissing communication was also positively associated with impulsivity in the happy interaction, and emotion coaching was positively associated with adolescent emotion regulation in the happy interaction and adolescent impulsivity in both the happy and unhappy interactions. In families of non-harmful alcohol use, emotion coaching communication was negatively associated with adolescent impulsivity in the unhappy interaction and emotion dismissing communication was negatively associated with adolescent emotion regulation in the unhappy interaction.

Tests of Hypotheses and Research Questions

The hypotheses and research questions were evaluated using hierarchical linear regression. The dependent variable in each analysis was either adolescent emotion regulation or adolescent behavioral impulsivity. Separate analyses were conducted for each outcome variable for both the happy and unhappy interactions. The first step of each regression included

adolescents' age and gender, parents' relationship status, number of children in the family, and a dummy coded variable indicating whether the participating parent was or was not the harmful alcohol use parent as control variables. The second step of each model included the parental communication variables (e.g., emotion coaching, emotion dismissing) and a dummy coded variable identifying the family as harmful or non-harmful alcohol use. To address the research questions in this study, the third step of each model included the interaction term between the substantive predictor(s) in the model and family alcohol status.

Emotion coaching parental communication. In the models predicting adolescents' emotion regulation, the control variables accounted for 18% of the variance in emotion regulation in the happy interaction and 13% of the variance in emotion regulation in the unhappy interaction, but none of the effects were significant (see Table 2). The substantive predictors on step two accounted for 22% of the variance in adolescents' emotion regulation during the happy interaction and 24% of the variance in adolescents' emotion regulation during the unhappy interaction. Emotion coaching was positively associated with adolescent emotion regulation in both the happy and unhappy interactions demonstrating full support for *H1*. The interaction terms entered on step three of the model were non-significant for both models, indicating no differences in the associations for families of harmful versus non-harmful alcohol use.

In the models for behavioral impulsivity, the control variables accounted for 2% of the variance in adolescents' behavioral impulsivity for both models and none of the variables were significant predictors (see Table 2). The variables entered on step two accounted for 23% of the variance in behavioral impulsivity in the happy interaction and 21% of the variance in behavioral impulsivity in the unhappy interaction. Contrary to predictions (*H2*), parents' emotion coaching was positively associated with adolescent behavioral impulsivity in both the happy and the

unhappy interactions. The interaction term entered on the third step accounted for 12% of the variance in the happy conversation and 8% of the variance in the unhappy conversation. Results revealed a significant moderating effect for both models as noted in Table 2.

To evaluate the moderation, we conducted a separate simple slopes analysis (Preacher, Curran, & Bauer, 2006). As shown in Figure 1, for the happy interaction the association between emotion coaching behavior and adolescent impulsivity was positive and significant for families of harmful parental alcohol use ($\beta = .54, p < .001$) and negative but not significant for families with non-harmful alcohol use ($\beta = -.25, p = .79$). Thus, adolescents from families of harmful alcohol use are more impulsive under conditions of emotion coaching communication than adolescents from families of non-harmful alcohol use (*RQ1*). Simple slopes analysis found neither path significant in the unhappy interaction.

Emotion dismissing parental communication. In the models predicting adolescents' emotion regulation, the control variables accounted for 18% of the variance in the happy interaction and 13% of the variance in the unhappy interaction, with the participating parent's alcohol status negatively associated with emotion regulation in the happy conversation (see Table 2). The substantive predictors on step two accounted for 11% of the variance in the happy interaction and 14% of the variance in the unhappy interaction. The results indicated that parents' emotion dismissing behavior was not significantly associated with adolescent emotion regulation in either the happy or the unhappy interaction. Thus, the main effect for emotion dismissing communication did not support *H3*; however, the interaction term entered on the third step accounted for 9% of the variance in adolescent emotion regulation in the happy interaction and revealed a significant moderating effect.

We calculated simple slopes to determine the direction of the moderating effect (see Figure 2). Results indicated a positive and significant association between emotion dismissing behavior and adolescent emotion regulation for adolescents from families of harmful alcohol use ($\beta = .53, p = .04$), but a nonsignificant association for adolescents from families of non-harmful alcohol use ($\beta = -.16, p = .97$). Thus, adolescents from families with harmful parental alcohol use are better at regulating their emotions in the presence of emotion dismissing communication compared to adolescents from families with non-harmful parental alcohol use (*RQ2*).

In the models predicting adolescent behavioral impulsivity, the control variables accounted for 2% of the variance in both the happy and unhappy interactions and none were significant predictors (see Table 2). The variables entered on step two accounted for 30% of the variance in the happy interaction and 41% of the variance in the unhappy interaction. As predicted (*H4*), emotion dismissing communication was positively associated with adolescent behavioral impulsivity in both the happy and unhappy conversations. The interaction term entered on the third step accounted for 9% of the variance in adolescent impulsivity in the happy conversation and revealed that family alcohol status had a significant moderating effect (see Figure 3). Simple slopes analysis confirmed that the association between emotion dismissing communication and adolescent impulsivity was positive and significant for families of harmful alcohol use ($\beta = .90, p < .001$), and not significant for families of non-harmful alcohol use ($\beta = .22, p = .94$). Thus, adolescents from families with harmful parental alcohol use are significantly more impulsive under conditions of emotion dismissing communication compared to adolescents from families with non-harmful parental alcohol use (*RQ2*).

Discussion

Communication is a vital mechanism through which personal resilience is fostered and expressed (Buzzanell & Houston, 2018). Parental communication can be particularly influential in modeling and shaping resilience for children and adolescents (Theiss, 2018). This study applied Gottman's emotion regulation theory to identify features of parental communication that are associated with potential emotional and behavioral markers of adolescent resilience. As expected, parents' emotion coaching communication was positively associated with adolescents' emotion regulation, but unexpectedly, it was also positively associated with behavioral impulsivity. Parents' emotion dismissing communication was not significantly associated with adolescents' emotion regulation, but it was positively associated with adolescents' behavioral impulsivity. These findings suggest that the dimensions of parental communication are uniquely associated with the potential markers of adolescent resilience. This study also examined a parent's harmful alcohol use as a moderator of associations between parental communication and possible markers of adolescent resilience. Results indicated that adolescents from families of harmful parental alcohol use are more impulsive under parents' emotion coaching and emotion dismissing communication and better at emotion regulation in response to emotion dismissing communication, as compared to their peers from families of non-harmful parental alcohol use. In this discussion, we highlight the theoretical implications for extending emotion regulation theory and the family communication literature, as well as practical implications for promoting adolescent resilience in families of harmful alcohol use.

Parental Communication and Potential Markers of Adolescent Resilience

Our first hypothesis predicted that parents' emotion coaching communication is positively associated with adolescent emotion regulation, which was supported and the effect was not moderated by family alcohol status. These findings corroborate prior research suggesting

that emotion coaching communication is influential in the effective regulation of emotions (Cupach & Olson, 2006) and the development of resilience (Theiss, 2018), regardless of conditions in the family. We also predicted that parents' emotion coaching communication is negatively associated with adolescents' behavioral impulsivity, but results indicated a positive rather than negative association in both interactions. These findings challenge previous research suggesting that children with emotion coaching parents exhibit less aggression and fewer behavioral problems (Gottman & Katz, 1995). One explanation for this finding may be related to the age of the adolescents in our sample. Although emotion coaching communication is instrumental in socializing young children (Gottman et al., 1997), adolescents may find their parents' coaching behavior to be patronizing or intrusive. Heavy parental involvement may make it difficult for adolescents to experience and establish their own abilities for navigating difficult circumstances (Buzzanell, 2010), which could undercut parents' efforts to encourage resilient behaviors (Theiss, 2018). Therefore, adolescents may demonstrate increased impulsivity under these conditions as a form of reactance (Afifi, Granger, Denes, Joseph, & Aldeis, 2011). Another explanation may be that the effect is bidirectional, such that parents are motivated to enact more emotion coaching communication in response to adolescent behavior that is deemed inappropriate (Eisenberg et al., 1996). Additional research is necessary to further probe these associations.

Emotion dismissing communication was a more robust predictor of adolescents' behavioral impulsivity than emotion regulation. Emotion dismissing communication was not significantly associated with adolescent emotion regulation in either the happy or the unhappy interaction. One possibility is that the positive emotions displayed by adolescents did not warrant emotionally dismissive communication in the happy interaction, since the expression of positive

emotions is considered more socially acceptable than the expression of negative emotions (Gottman et al., 1996). Another explanation may be related to methodology. The conversational topics selected for this study and the short interaction period may not have allowed for enough depth to generate strong emotions that would elicit an emotion dismissing response from parents. In contrast, emotion dismissing communication was positively associated with adolescent impulsivity in both interactions, supporting our prediction. These results are consistent with prior research suggesting that adolescents tend to rebel or act out in the face of a parent's efforts to control them or diminish their feelings (Aunola & Nurmi, 2005). Alternatively, we also acknowledge the potential for reciprocal effects, such that parents may demonstrate more emotion dismissing behavior in response to inappropriate adolescent behavior.

Our results were not always consistent with findings from previous research and present some important theoretical considerations. Although most studies document positive outcomes as a result of emotion coaching communication, our results suggest that emotion coaching communication is not always helpful, just as support messages are not always perceived as comforting or supportive (Rossetto, 2015). These findings may provide an opportunity to further explore the ways in which emotion coaching messages are communicated and how they are received. The same could be said for the emotion dismissing dimension. Perhaps some emotions are worth dismissing, such as an overreaction or a dramatic emotional appeal for the sake of attention. In light of the strong positive associations between parents' emotion dismissing communication and adolescents' behavioral impulsivity it is also worth investigating adolescents' perceptions of parenting behavior and the attributions they make for parental messages. Compared to young children, adolescents may be more resistant and reactive to parental intrusions in their emotions and behaviors given their age, maturity, and desire for

independence. These results point to fruitful avenues of research for family communication scholars to consider how parental communication may have different outcomes depending on the perception, age, and maturity of the child, and the focus of the conversation (Branje, Laursen, & Collins, 2012).

At a broader level, the results of this study highlight the multilevel communicated aspects of resilience and point to the utility of parent-child interaction for developing resilient children and families (Theiss, 2018; Patterson 2002). This study positioned resilience as a quality that is evident in conversation through adolescents' emotion regulation and behavioral impulsivity. Results suggest that the potential markers of adolescent resilience are responsive to parental communication, which is itself reflective of a certain degree of resilience and openness in the family system (MacPhee, Lunkenheimer, & Riggs, 2015). Thus, our findings imply that there is reciprocity in the family system, such that resilient parents and families help to cultivate individual resilience in children, which in turn reinforces resilience in the family. Notably, interpersonal communication is a crucial mechanism in the process of facilitating these patterns of resilience.

Implications for Families of Harmful Parental Alcohol Use

The results of this study also have practical applications for assisting families with harmful parental alcohol use. Two research questions examined whether adolescents from families of harmful versus non-harmful parental alcohol use would respond differently to emotion coaching communication (*RQ1*) and emotion dismissing communication (*RQ2*). Results point to some notable differences between adolescents from harmful and non-harmful alcohol use families. First, adolescents from families of harmful parental alcohol use demonstrated more impulsivity under conditions of emotion coaching communication than adolescents from families

with non-harmful parental alcohol use families. Children of parents who harmfully consume alcohol tend to demonstrate more externalizing behaviors and impulsivity than other children (Straussner & Fewell, 2011), which suggests two possible explanations for this moderating effect. First, we turn again to the possibility of reciprocal effects. In other words, parental communication may not be driving this effect; it may be responsive to adolescent behavior. A second possibility is that adolescents from families of harmful alcohol use might perceive a double standard when parents attempt to coach them to behave more appropriately. Given that parents who harmfully consume alcohol can demonstrate antisocial, narcissistic, and neglectful actions (Schade, 2006), adolescents may react to parental efforts to enforce behaviors that they themselves fail to enact.

The second significant interaction points to an interesting divergence between adolescents from each family type. Adolescent emotion regulation increased in response to emotion dismissing communication only in families with harmful parental alcohol use. Why would adolescents with a parent who harmfully consumes alcohol demonstrate greater emotion regulation in response to a parent's dismissive communication? One possible explanation is that these children are conditioned to respond to their parent's moods and demands in ways that preserve harmony and prevent conflicts (Velleman & Templeton, 2007). In this context, if a parent suggests that a particular emotion is inappropriate, unwarranted, or overblown, adolescents may be motivated to stifle, control, or regulate that emotion to satisfy their parent and prevent further anger or upset. This explanation is speculative and requires further probing of the effect in larger samples, but it provides an initial glimpse into the emotional climate in families of harmful parental alcohol use.

The third significant interaction showed that adolescents from families of harmful parental alcohol use were significantly more impulsive under conditions of emotion dismissing communication. In families without harmful parental alcohol use, adolescents may be more likely to interpret a parent's emotion dismissing communication as an act of discipline and adapt their behavior to conform to expectations. In families of harmful parental alcohol use, on the other hand, adolescents might be more likely to view emotion dismissing communication as hypocrisy. Parents with harmful alcohol consumption, who can sometimes demonstrate inappropriate and overblown emotional responses to social situations (Lam et al., 2007; Stanger et al., 2004), may frustrate adolescents when told that their emotions are unjustified. Thus, the perceived double-standard may result in more externalizing behavior.

Taken together, the findings in this study offer recommendations for improving parental communication to potentially promote adolescent resilience, especially in families of harmful parental alcohol use. Our study suggests that adolescents of parents that harmfully consume alcohol demonstrate more impulsivity in response to both emotion coaching and emotion dismissing communication, which presents a sort of lose-lose scenario for parents in this situation. It seems that adolescents in families of harmful parental alcohol use do not respond well to parents who try to insert themselves into their emotional experiences, regardless of the tenor of the conversation. Thus, one recommendation for families of harmful parental alcohol use is to create a climate that encourages and allows a wide range of emotional reactions to interpersonal events. Families with a high conversation orientation and low conformity orientation, for example, cultivate an ideal context for adolescents to experience and express emotions that may be contrary to parental expectations (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002). Moreover, the family resilience framework (Walsh, 2003) suggests that resilient family systems tend to

demonstrate flexibility, encourage connectedness, and communicate with openness, clarity, and collaboration in ways that buffer stress and bolster healing in response to crisis or hardship.

Thus, practitioners working with families of harmful parental alcohol use may encourage flexibility and diversity in family members' emotional reactions to interpersonal circumstances through didactic training and role-play exercises where adolescents are given the latitude to initiate and drive conversations about emotion.

Another recommended practice for parents is to strive for consistent communication behaviors and to model desired expressions of emotion in their own behavior. To the extent that parents in families of harmful parental alcohol use can establish consistent expectations and norms for behavior within the family, adolescents in these families may sense less hypocrisy and feel less frustration over being held to unreasonable standards. Practitioners working with these families may encourage consistent communication behavior through check-ins, which give the parent(s) and adolescent an opportunity to relay the successes and/or failures of their emotion coaching and emotion regulation attempts. Previous research using a similar approach found improvements in child externalizing behavior, reduction in symptoms related to trauma, and parent reports of less stress (Timmer, Hawk, Forte, Boys, & Urquiza, 2019). Similarly, families that construct a shared narrative of adverse events and engage in collective sensemaking tend to cope with adversity in more constructive and functional ways (Koenig Kellas, 2015). These communication strategies, when applied, could help to promote consistency in parental communication and help to cultivate adolescent resilience.

Strengths, Limitations, and Future Directions

This study has some notable strengths. First, the comparison design with families of harmful and non-harmful parental alcohol use provides a unique look at how different family

environments may lead to differences in communication behaviors and outcomes. The fact that our results point to several differences between the two groups is noteworthy for individuals from more adverse family backgrounds. Second, this study used observational methods to assess parental communication and potential markers of adolescent resilience. Survey methods can lead to social desirability biases, particularly in terms of how parents perceive their own communication. Observational methods can somewhat circumvent these biases. Third, this study contributes to our knowledge of emotion regulation theory and family communication. The findings of this study demonstrate the value of this theory and results highlight the utility of emotion regulation theory across family types.

This study also has some limitations. First, the sample size of the study is relatively small, which may have limited our power to detect small or medium effects. Second, the eligibility criteria for this study did not control for whether the parent with or without harmful alcohol use participated in the study. It is possible that children have very different interactions with a parent that harmfully consumes alcohol compared to parents with no harmful alcohol use. Nevertheless, family systems theory suggests that when one family member is struggling, all family members are likely to adapt their behavior to compensate for disruptions to the functioning system (Johnson & Ray, 2016). As such, we are likely to see similar communication behaviors and adolescent outcomes regardless of the participating parent. Third, and somewhat relatedly, we had considerably more mothers in our sample than fathers. To the extent that mothers and fathers enact different communication behaviors with their children, variation in communication styles could have influenced our findings. Fourth, our study design presents possible issues in ecological validity. A sample size of 60 parent-adolescent dyads may not reflect the experiences of the broader population and is therefore not generalizable. Relatedly,

the brief interactions in this study are only a snapshot of parent-child communication dynamics and may not depict the nuanced features of the relationship and family context. Finally, though this study was framed with a resilience perspective, resilience was not directly assessed.

The results of this study present several opportunities for future research. One avenue for future research is to measure longer periods of interaction and introduce topics that are more likely to trigger strong emotions to see, for example, if the associations between emotion coaching communication and impulsivity replicate. Another direction for future research is to incorporate both parents, especially in cases where one parent harmfully consumes alcohol and the other does not. This would allow researchers to examine differences in communication across parent types, as well as to identify any co-parenting influences. Research that examines communication in families of harmful parental alcohol use, and the potential effects communication has on resilience, may provide useful information for developing evidence-based programming geared towards substance abuse prevention.

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Notes

1 We did not require that the participating parent have an alcohol use disorder because we did not want to put the adolescents in situations that might cause discomfort. Evidence suggests that parent's harmful alcohol use can affect communication dynamics in relationships across the entire family system (Johnson & Ray, 2016; Straussner & Fewell, 2011); thus, participating parents from these families are likely to demonstrate unique parental communication patterns regardless of whether they or their partner had the harmful alcohol use.

2 The 5-minute duration for each interaction follows procedures established by McLaren and Pederson (2014) who found that a 5-minute conversation was of sufficient length to document patterns of interaction among adolescents.

3 Prior research has shown 30-second intervals to be a sufficient amount of time to capture multiple conversational turns reflecting a shift in emotional tone (McLaren & Pederson, 2014). Also, using 30-second intervals produced 10 conversational ratings for each interaction, which was desirable for capturing variability in communication behavior across the interaction.

Table 1

Bivariate Correlations

	V1	V2	V3	V4	V5	V6	V7	V8
V1: Emo. Coaching (Unhappy)	---	.55**	-.55***	-.39*	.41*	.29	-.42*	-.20
V2: Emo. Coaching (Happy)	.93***	---	-.29	-.68***	.48**	.27	-.55**	-.31
V3: Emo. Dismissing (Unhappy)	.48**	.59***	---	.50**	-.45*	-.27	.48**	.43*
V4: Emo. Dismissing (Happy)	.66***	.66***	.86***	---	-.58***	-.18	.50**	.33
V5: Emo. Regulation (Unhappy)	.44*	.44*	.11	.35	---	.42*	-.87***	-.70***
V6: Emo. Regulation (Happy)	.47**	.51**	.18	.35	.95***	---	-.28	-.65***
V7: Impulsivity (Unhappy)	.36*	.46*	.55**	.41*	-.34	-.26	---	.71***
V8: Impulsivity (Happy)	.41*	.47**	.56***	.50**	-.22	-.17	.94***	---

Note. Harmful parental alcohol use families' ($N = 30$) correlations are reported below the diagonal, non-harmful alcohol use families' ($N = 30$) correlations are reported above the diagonal.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 2

Emotion Coaching and Emotion Dismissing Associated with Adolescents' Emotion Regulation and Behavioral Impulsivity

	Emotion Coaching				Emotion Dismissing											
	Emotion Regulation		Behavioral Impulsivity		Emotion Regulation		Behavioral Impulsivity									
	Happy	Unhappy	Happy	Unhappy	Happy	Unhappy	Happy	Unhappy								
	$R^2 \Delta$	β	$R^2 \Delta$	β	$R^2 \Delta$	β	$R^2 \Delta$	β								
Step One	.18		.13		.02		.02		.18		.13		.02		.02	
Adolescent Gender		.05		.09		-.03		-.05		.05		.09		-.03		-.05
Adolescent Age		.15		.10		.08		.14		.15		.10		.08		.14
Parent Rel. Status		.13		.15		.06		-.01		.13		.15		.06		-.01
No. of Children		.21		.22		.07		.03		.21		.22		.07		.03
Participating Parent		-.34		-.23		-.05		-.01		-.34*		-.23		-.05		-.01
Step Two	.22***		.24***		.23**		.21**		.11*		.14*		.30***		.41***	
Family Status		.36		.41*		-.61**		-.68**		.43*		.58**		-.69**		-.63***
Emo. Coaching		.39**		.37**		.40**		.34*								
Emo. Dismissing										.14		-.11		.53***		.57***
Step Three	.01		.00		.12**		.08*		.07*		.05		.09*		.03	
EC _a xAlc		-.11		.08		-.45**		-.37*								
ED _b xAlc										-.42*		-.32		-.48*		-.24

Note. Cell entries are $R^2 \Delta$ statistics and standardized β coefficients. _aEC = Emotion Coaching and _bED = Emotion Dismissing.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Figure 1

Moderating Effect of Family Alcohol Status on the Association between Parental Emotion Coaching Communication and Adolescent Impulsivity during the Happy Interaction

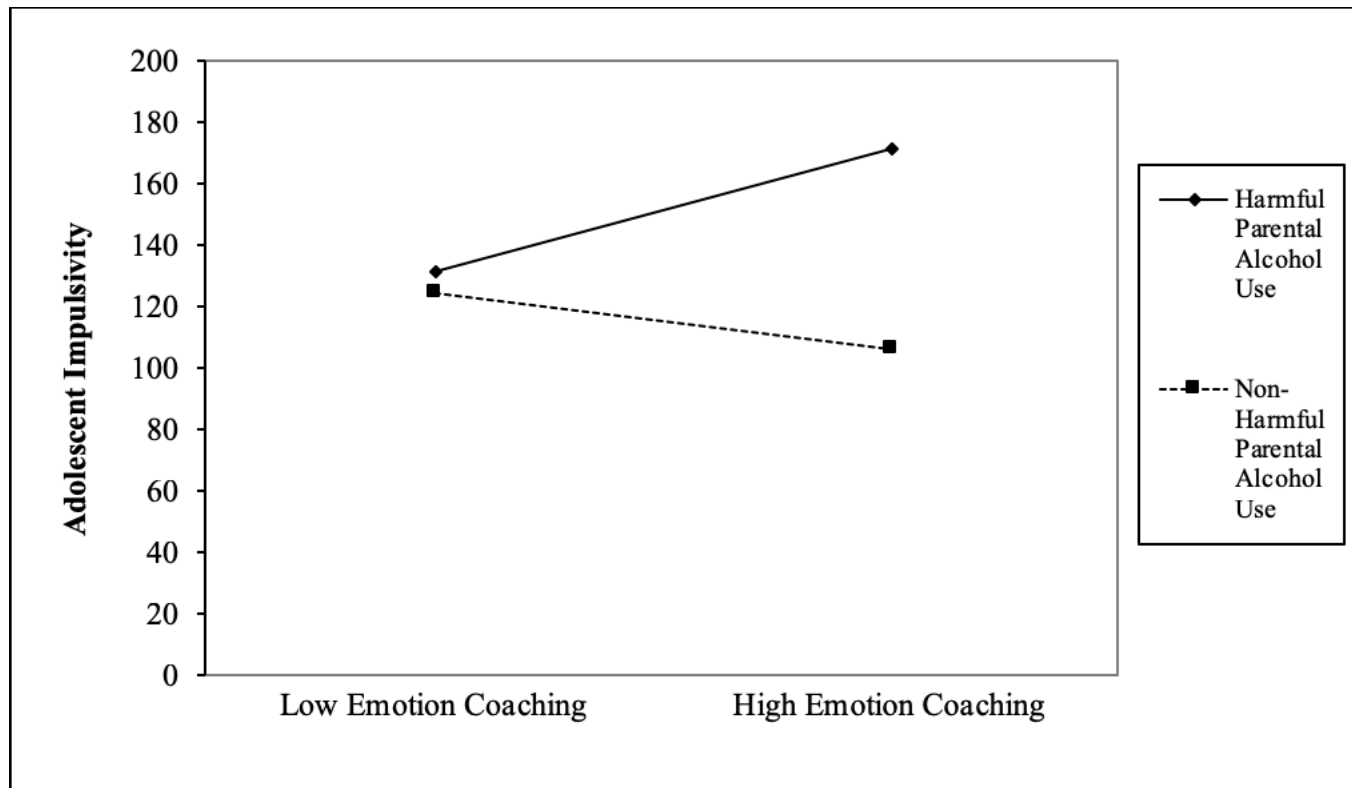


Figure 2

Moderating Effect of Family Alcohol Status on the Association between Parental Emotion Dismissing Communication and Adolescent Emotion Regulation during the Happy Interaction

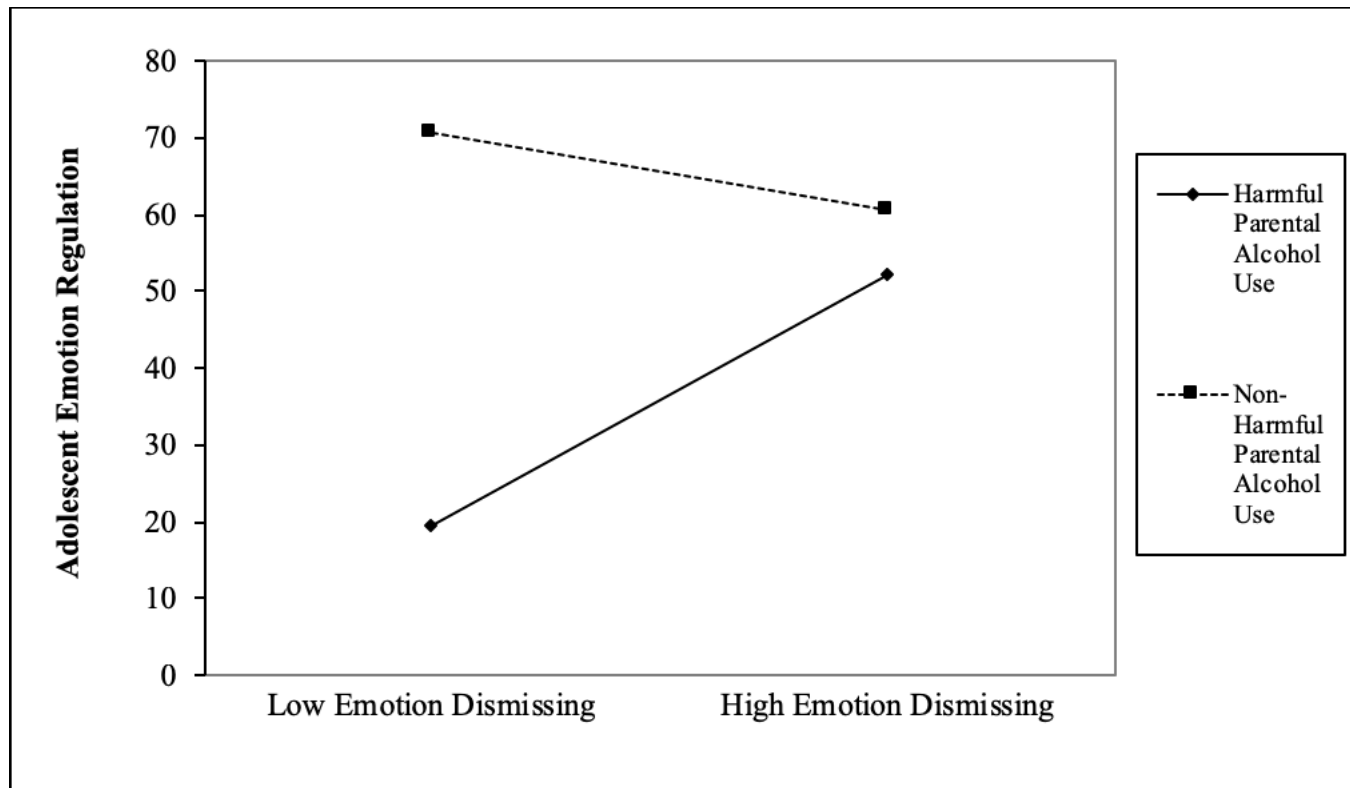


Figure 3

Moderating Effect of Family Alcohol Status on the Association between Parental Emotion Dismissing Communication and Adolescent Impulsivity during the Happy Interaction

