

**Children's Beliefs About the
Social Consequences of Emotional Expression**

by

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Abstract

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Professor Christina Maslach, Chair

This study investigated young children's expectations regarding others' potential reactions to their emotional displays. These expectations were considered precursors to the display rules for emotional expression evident in middle childhood. Possible gender differences in the children's expectancies for the expression of anger, sadness and fear were examined.

Preschool and early grade school children (ages 4.3-6.4 & 7.0-8.7, respectively) were presented with eight hypothetical narratives illustrated with felt puppets. The identity of an audience figure accompanying the protagonist of each narrative varied between subjects in three experimental conditions: mother, father, and same-sex peer. The narratives also varied the social context within which the protagonist expressed an emotion. The scenarios were qualitatively coded to assess if children expected favorable or unfavorable reactions from the audience figure to the protagonist's emotional display.

The expression of anger elicited substantial unfavorable expectancies from children in both age groups but the expression of sadness and fear did not. It was theorized that the display rules for these emotions have different developmental timelines.

Anger receives early socialization pressure while sadness and fear are not sanctioned until after approximately age 8. Children expected peers and parents to respond equally unfavorably to expressions of anger, suggesting that both groups are important agents in emotional socialization at this age. Unlike the preschoolers, the early grade school children used social information about a provocateur's status and intentions to mediate their expectations regarding audience reactions to anger. The only significant gender difference to emerge was that the older girls expected mothers to be more disapproving of anger than fathers or peers. It was suggested that gender role requirements for emotional expression may not be enforced until children reach grade school ages and that the same-sex parent may come to be the primary socialization agent for these roles. Asian-American children held fewer unfavorable expectancies for the expression of anger than children of other ethnicities. African-American girls held more unfavorable expectancies for the expression of anger than African-American boys. Future research should elaborate upon the specific content and developmental timelines associated with different cultures' emotional display rules.

Professor Christina Maslach, Chair

Dedication

To the memory of my beloved mother, Mary Esther Feito.

Table of Contents

1.	Introduction	1
1.1.	The Nature of Emotion.....	2
1.1.1.	Theoretical Perspectives.....	2
1.1.2.	Display Rules for Emotional Expression	9
1.1.2.1.	Age of acquisition	14
1.1.2.2.	Potential socialization agents	17
1.1.2.3.	Types of emotional expression.....	20
1.1.2.4.	Social context factors	21
1.1.2.4.1.	Status	22
1.1.2.4.2.	Intentionality	23
1.2.	Gender Roles	28
1.2.1.	Gender Stereotypes among Adults	30
1.2.2.	Emotional Expression among Adults.....	31
1.2.3.	Children’s Gender Stereotypes.....	33
1.2.4.	Agents of Gender Socialization.....	37
1.3.	The Present Study.....	39
2.	Method	46
2.1.	Subjects	46
2.2.	Stimulus Materials	47
2.2.1.	Protagonist’s Emotions	48
2.2.2.	Audience.....	50

2.3.	Procedure.....	50
2.4.	Coding.....	51
2.4.1.	Favorability	51
2.4.2.	Intentionality	53
3.	Results.....	54
3.1.	Overall Expectations By Emotion	54
3.2.	Expectations for Specific Emotions	55
3.3.	Audience Condition.....	57
3.4.	Intentionality	59
3.5.	Status of Target	62
4.	Discussion	65
4.1.	Overview	65
4.2.	The Hypotheses	71
4.2.1.	Gender Differences.....	71
4.2.2.	Audience Condition.....	73
4.2.3.	Social Context.....	81
4.2.3.1.	Intentionality	82
4.2.3.2.	Status	86
4.3.	Ethnic Differences.....	89
4.4.	Methodological Issues.....	93
4.5.	General Conclusions	99
4.6.	Future Research Directions	106
4.7.	Epilogue	109

4.8.	References	111
4.9.	Appendix A	119

List of Charts and Tables

Chart #1: Unfavorable Responses by Scene Type.....	54
Chart #2 & Table #2: Responses to Anger by Age, Gender, and Audience.....	58
Chart #3 & Table #3: Responses to Anger by Intent and Age	60
Chart #4: Mentions of Intentionality by Age and Scene	61
Chart#5 & Table #5: Responses to Anger by Status and Age.....	63
Chart #6 & Table #6: Responses to Anger toward a Peer by Ethnicity and Sex...	64

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CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

Max just had his fourth birthday party at preschool and is now running around playing Power Rangers with his two pals, Manny and Owen. Their teacher warns them about running too fast on the asphalt in the playground but the boys disregard her and squeal mischievously. Max abruptly trips and falls squarely on his hands and knees. His concerned teacher rushes to the crash site, ready to hold and console. She witnesses as Max's face first shows the characteristic disorientation and astonishment she has come to expect in situations like these. However, instead of breaking into a good cry, Max glances briefly at his playmates, picks himself up and retreats from the teacher to reinitiate the Power Rangers game. All the while, his face remains frozen in a strange and effortful grimace somehow reminiscent of his initial surprise. Five minutes later, the incident has seemingly been forgotten by all but the teacher, who stands by musing.

How do we, as psychologists, begin to understand the sequence of events that took place in this very ordinary slice of preschool life? The story of “Max’s Fall” highlights a number of interesting issues surrounding the fundamental nature of emotion as well as how emotional expression comes to function in our day-to-day lives. Did Max have an emotional experience following his fall? And if so how do we ascertain this since he did not cry or otherwise express his presumed internal state? An intuitive reading of the story seems to suggest that Max felt pain after his fall but somehow kept himself from expressing it outwards. If this is the case, how did he accomplish such a feat and just as importantly, why? Is there some hidden reason that Max chose to dissimulate his distress?

Does it have to do with the social context in which the emotion took place, the presence of his peers or teacher perhaps?

These are some of the questions which will guide our inquiry in the pages to come. We will explore the psychological literature on emotion in an effort to more clearly understand how Max and other children like him come to appreciate the social realities of emotional expression. Max's story will serve as a backdrop and reference point during our investigation. Ultimately, we will settle on some new and unique research questions about the "why" behind these phenomena and attempt to investigate these questions empirically via systematic research. The first step in our journey will address the fundamental question of "what is emotion?"

The Nature of Emotions

What do we mean by the deceptively simple term, "emotion?" Psychologists from diverse backgrounds and perspectives have attempted to define just what emotions are, and the result reminds one of the Fable of the Blind Men and the Elephant. Each struggles to define the animal by closely examining the part that is in their hands. Psychologists tend to define emotion according to the phenomena that interest them the most.

Theoretical Perspectives

The first group of Blind Men handle the Elephant's thoughts. Cognitive psychologists have focused on the role of evaluation, appraisal and thought in mediating

the experience of emotions. Many have described “meaning analysis” as central to the processes that instigate emotional states (e.g. Mandler, 1984). From this perspective, some classic definitions view emotion as a cognitive interpretation of physiological arousal (e.g. Schachter, 1966). In terms of our original vignette, a cognitive account would begin by acknowledging Max’s physiological response to falling down and then stress the process by which Max “decides” what feeling he is actually experiencing.

Another theoretical approach ignores the inner thinking processes supposedly underlying emotions, and instead deigns to look only at those behaviors that accompany emotion. Some behavioral psychologists define emotion as a “felt action tendency”: basically, a motivation to act, with a feeling tone (e.g. Frijda, 1988; Arnold, 1960). From this perspective, Max may not even be having an emotional experience after falling down since after a brief pause, his behavior seems to continue as it did before. Biological psychologists emphasize the internal arousal states associated with emotional experiences. They would understand Max’s emotional state as a function of his epinephrine or serotonin levels following the fall. Some psychologists from this perspective focus on the potentially adaptive functions of emotions (Plutchik, 1984; Izard, 1994; Campos, Campos, & Barrett, 1989) They see emotion as the product of a long process of evolution in the human species. Max’s emotion might be a by-product of an ancient fight-or-flight response hardwired to the experience of physical pain.

Regardless of their particular emphasis, virtually all theorists of emotion agree that emotions must be regarded as complex transactions between an individual and the environment. Defining emotion has been an ongoing, open-ended project without any foreseeable culmination but with great intrinsic value, nonetheless. Each attempt at

definition draws attention to important aspects of what we understand to be emotional experience. For our purposes, we need not come to a definitive or exclusive understanding of what emotion is; for now, it is enough to hold the diverse conceptions of emotion in our minds without taking a stand.

It is useful, however, to make some distinctions between the components of emotion as they are presently understood. This offers us a more detailed vocabulary for discussing the topic. Most definitions include a physiological component, a behavioral component and an experiential component (Carlson & Hatfield, 1992; Lewis & Michaelson, 1983). We will use the term “emotional experience” to refer to the physiological arousal state frequently associated with emotions, combined with the experiential, subjective apprehension of that arousal - the feeling. We will reserve the term “expression” to refer to the behavioral correlates of an emotional experience. These outward manifestations of emotion might include potentially observable changes in face, voice, body, and activity level. Finally, the term “elicitors” has achieved common parlance in emotion theory as referring to those environmental and internal stimuli that bring about emotional experiences in an individual (Lewis & Michaelson, 1983). In the case of Max, a potential elicitor was his unexpected fall onto the asphalt. This elicitor may have led to an emotional experience within Max which included physiological arousal as well as a “feeling” state. Without an accompanying expression, however, this experience remains opaque to simple observation attempts. In Max’s case, we have only his paradoxical facial expression by which to judge his internal experience. The apparent contrast between what we expect his experience to have been and what his expression in fact was, gives his story its inherent interest to us.

Intuitively, the prospect that Max might be managing his emotional expression to meet certain social needs seems compelling. His emotional expression, or lack thereof, may serve an important social function for him. In order to explore this possibility, it is informative to first look at what psychologists have said overall, about the possible functions of emotion. Emotional expressions clearly function to communicate an individual's internal states to others (Carlson & Hatfield, 1992; Campos, et al, 1989; Plutchik, 1984). The ability to quickly communicate needs, desires, and intentions to other members of a social group can serve vital interests for survival. Many emotional responses may have evolved to promote the social connectedness that is so important for the success of the human species (Plutchik, 1984) . Many theorists believe that connections between emotional experiences and emotional expressions are genetically preprogrammed in infants in order to facilitate interactions with their caregivers (e.g. Izard, 1994; Tronick, 1989; Izard & Malatesta, 1987; Plutchik, 1984). Substantial research on interactions between infants and caregivers has uncovered a complex dance of reciprocal emotional exchanges that regulate the care between preverbal infants and their caregivers (Tronick, 1989). In addition to mediating the care of the young, emotions also have evolutionary functions in the realm of self-preservation, predation, and courtship. Behavioral responses such as flight, aggression, and sexuality are accompanied by the emotional experiences and arousal states which facilitate them (Plutchik, 1984).

These types of evolutionary theories suggest that the connections between our emotional experiences and their expression are biologically predetermined and fixed (e.g. Milenson, 1967). They focus on the instinct-like and reflexive quality of emotional reactions, especially among the very young. An infant's cries and other expressive

vocalizations may be the only avenue for expressing its internal states and needs to appropriate caregivers. Many theorists have suggested that infants come into the world with a ready set of primary emotional expressions which can be universally understood by others (e.g. Izard, 1990, 1994; Ekman, 1993; Izard & Malatesta, 1987). Evolutionary or “expressive” emotion theorists have studied facial expressions in an attempt to uncover a universal repertoire of emotional experiences. An extensive, and quite successful, research effort has focused on clearly establishing the existence of universal facial expressions among infants and young children. Within their first year of development, children consistently produce prototypic facial expressions to express their internal emotional states (Izard, 1994). Ten basic emotion complexes, with their corresponding facial expressions, have been identified in children: interest, joy, surprise, distress, anger, disgust, contempt, fear, shame, and guilt (Izard & Malatesta, 1987). Some of these emotions are evident in the first year, while others such as the “social” emotions of shame and guilt, await the cognitive capacities for self-awareness which emerge in the second and third years (Lewis & Michaelson, 1983). Research has also identified these same facial expressions cross-culturally in an effort to strengthen the argument for their universality (Ekman, 1993).

For the most part, the evolutionary emotion theorists have not been especially interested in the effects of socialization on the experience or expression of emotion. Their research program has focused on uncovering the universal underpinnings of our emotional vocabulary without regard to the inevitable individual differences that arise during maturation and learning. However, they do concede that socialization pressures can affect the original, predetermined links between emotional experiences and their

expression (e.g. Ekman, 1993). Differential emotions theory is a good example of an evolutionary theory which has been elaborated to include the effects of socialization (Izard & Malatesta, 1987). Although it states that the initial connections between emotional experience and its expression are biologically predetermined, it does not claim that these connections remain continually functional. Unlike instincts, the expressions of emotion show developmental changes through maturation and socialization, without ever dropping out of the behavioral repertoire. Expressive behaviors continue to be produced but are no longer exclusively contingent on accompanying emotional experiences. The link between experience and expression becomes unlearned through the socialization process. The initially reflex-like emotional reactions are gradually minimized and subordinated as an individual develops. With the maturation of inhibitory mechanisms and higher order cognitive skills, children can increasingly control their expressive behaviors. The once fixed link between experience and expression becomes more flexible and allows the child more conscious control of his/her emotional expressions. This accounts for the emergence of the ability to dissimulate their feelings by modifying their outward expressions. This ability ultimately allows them to deceive others regarding their internal emotional states (Ekman, 1988). Max's vignette may illustrate a similar process of dissimulation. The linkage between the pain of the fall and the expression of crying has become flexible enough for Max to suppress the expression while still inwardly experiencing the emotion. Differential emotions theorists argue that these emerging abilities help children self-regulate their own feeling states as well as promote their social interactions. Children come to use emotional expressions to influence the behaviors of others.

In the past fifteen years, many emotion theorists have shifted their emphasis to these primarily social aspects of emotion. Functionalist approaches focus on the ongoing social or relational functions of emotions (Campos, et al, 1989; Barrett & Campos, 1987; Frijda, 1986). Whereas differential emotions theory and other more traditional approaches stress the underlying structure of emotion, the newer functionalist perspectives reconceptualize emotion as primarily a social phenomenon. They define emotions as “processes of establishing, maintaining, or disrupting the relations between the person and the internal or external environment, when such relations are significant to the individual” (Campos et al, 1989 p.395). Here, emotions are seen as complex social signals between individuals and their environment. The intrapsychic experience of emotion takes a back seat to its social regulatory functions. From this perspective, the social contexts within which emotions take place shape their meaning and importance. People communicate the significance of events to others via their emotionally expressive behaviors. For instance, anger occurs when a person’s goals are blocked by the environment. The behavioral aspects of the anger, such as aggression, are an attempt to overcome that blockage. This type of explanation represents more of a shift in emphasis than a categorically different understanding of emotion. The functionalist approach stresses the relational, interpersonal, and communicative aspects of emotion rather than the intrapersonal, internal ones. From this perspective, the process of emotional regulation takes on a more central role in our understandings about the nature of emotion. Returning again to our vignette, a functionalist would likely ask what type of social goals Max’s emotion may serve in the particular complex context of open play with same-sex friends in a preschool environment.

Many emotion researchers have chosen to more closely investigate the socialization process surrounding emotional expression (Saarni, 1985,1989; Hochschild, 1984; Lewis & Michaelson, 1983; Averill, 1980). During socialization, children learn to transform, inhibit, and mask many expressive behaviors in order to adapt to their social circumstances. They learn to employ emotions as a complex interactional language for regulating their relations with other people. One of the underlying grammars of this language is a set of culture-specific rules for emotional expression. These standards dictate when and how it is appropriate to display a given emotion. For instance, who can express anger toward whom and under what social circumstances? Early on, emotion researchers coined the term “display rules” to refer to these types of cultural standards (Ekman & Friesen, 1971,1975). These display rules are social constructs that vary from culture to culture. It is quite possible that a cultural display rule about the expression of distress might have affected our friend Max’s decision to avoid expressing his pain. His social group may endorse rules about the proper expression of distress for a boy his age.

Our inquiry will now narrow to look more specifically at the display rule literature and consider the state of knowledge on when and how children acquire these rules. In addition, this literature will allow us to begin forming our own research questions regarding the topic and gradually forging a methodology for addressing these questions.

Display Rules for Emotional Expression

Over the past twenty years, there has been a growing interest in how children understand and acquire display rules for emotional expression (see Saarni, 1989). The underlying premise of this literature has been that children gradually learn to dissimulate

their actual emotional states and express only those that are deemed socially appropriate for a given context. The majority of the research has focused on display rules that prohibit emotional expressions rather than those that allow them (Doubleday, Kovaric, & Dorr, 1990). These types of prohibitive display rules are exactly the kind that might be keeping Max from openly expressing his pain and distress. The display rule literature provides a useful conceptual and methodological framework for investigating our original questions regarding Max's fall.

Saarni's (1979) seminal research on display rules among children provided a methodological prototype for much of the subsequent work in the area. We will consider it here in some detail in order to appreciate the specific method by which display rules have traditionally been researched. Children, from ages 6 to 10 years old, were interviewed regarding their interpretations of four different fictional narratives, illustrated by photographs of real children. The narratives described situations of interpersonal conflict. In the last picture accompanying each story, the protagonist faced away from the camera; the subjects were asked to choose an expression for the protagonist from a bank of other photographs. Some expressions were congruent with the conventional emotion elicited by the situation, while others were consistent with the use of a display rule. For instance, one narrative depicted a child being given a disappointing gift by a relative. Children could choose among expressions which included disappointment as well as satisfaction or happiness. After choosing an expression, the children were asked why they made their selection and whether the protagonist could look still another way and why. Saarni qualitatively coded the responses according to whether a display rule was spontaneously invoked, the type of reason given, and the complexity of the social

reasoning involved. Her results indicated that the number of spontaneously mentioned display rules increased with age as did the complexity of the reasoning behind their use. This basic methodological paradigm of illustrated fictional narratives, clear visual dependent measures, and qualitative coding of verbal measures has been widely used in the display rule literature.

Let us assume, then, that our young friend Max was responding to a display rule when he chose to suppress his expression of distress. He had internalized some cultural prohibition to express sadness or distress in the particular context within which he found himself. The question arises as to what motivates Max to follow such a display rule since it is clearly quite difficult for him to hold back the outward expression of his pain. One possibility is that display rule acquisition may be partly based on reinforcement patterns surrounding early emotional expression. Children may build up expectations of negative reactions to their displays of emotion and these expectations may in turn motivate them to dissimulate or modify their expressive behavior. Research on display rules among adults suggests that expectancies are important in determining the likelihood that an individual will express a given emotion (Dosser, Ballswick, & Halverson, 1983).

These types of reinforcement mechanisms are consonant with a social learning perspective on the acquisition of display rules. Classic research on the expression of aggression and anger has delineated three important mechanisms of socialization: operant conditioning, modeling, and vicarious learning (Bandura, 1983). In operant conditioning, children directly experience negative consequences in reaction to their emotional displays and then later regulate these displays in order to avoid these same consequences. Operant conditioning may create a conscious or unconscious expectation regarding the

consequences of future expressive behaviors. Children also model the types of emotional expressions they see their parents or peers display regularly. Modeling alone would not necessarily associate positive or negative expectancies with an emotional display. In vicarious learning, children observe the consequences of others' expressive behavior. They take note of these consequences and build expectations regarding their own future displays of emotion. Vicarious learning could easily foster conscious expectancies in children regarding emotional expressions. Although Bandura's work has focused specifically on the socialization of anger and aggression, it seems reasonable to assume that other emotional expressions would be subject to similar social learning processes.

To speculate further on Max's situation, he may have noted that another boy fell in his class yesterday, cried, and was consequently removed from play by his teacher or else ridiculed and abandoned by his peers. Max then created an expectation that the same undesirable events would occur to him if he expressed his distress openly. Thus, he chose to dissimulate his pain by restricting his behavioral and facial expressions of it. On cue, his teacher withdrew and his fellow playmates continued their game with him. So Max's expectations may have formed a crucial link in the chain of internal and external events which led to his expressive behaviors (or lack thereof).

If vicarious learning processes help shape the acquisition of display rules, children may develop specific expectations regarding the expression of emotions in certain social contexts. Only two display rule studies have focused directly on what expectations children hold and can communicate about the consequences of emotional expression. (Fuchs & Thelen, 1988; Saarni, 1987). Both studies specifically investigate how children might expect their parents to respond to emotional displays. We will

consider them in greater detail as a stepping stone to begin formulating some research questions of our own, as well as an appropriate methodology.

Saarni (1987) interviewed 7 to 13-year-olds regarding how they expected parents to respond to various types of expressive displays. The children were presented with cartoon-illustrated vignettes and asked to choose among possible parental reactions to a child's emotions. The reactions varied from very controlling to very accepting or empathic. The findings indicated that the children were sensitive to who was made vulnerable by an emotional display. If the child-protagonist was made vulnerable by his/her own emotions, both adult and child subjects predicted a more accepting parental response. However, if the protagonist's display might hurt someone else's feelings, a more controlling response was predicted. Thus, Saarni confirmed that children expect negative consequences to certain types of emotional displays. In addition, her findings established that children are sensitive to the particular social context of these displays and invoke the appropriate display rules accordingly. Although sex differences were hypothesized in this study, none were found.

Fuchs and Thelen (1988) also investigated children's expectations regarding possible parental responses to emotion. Their method differed somewhat from Saarni's. They employed an affect-induction procedure to generate an experience of anger or sadness in their subjects. The children (6-11 years-old) were asked to remember an incident which on a previous occasion had elicited feelings of anger in them. Another experimental group remembered incidents eliciting sadness. After concentrating on these incidents for 30 seconds, the children were asked a structured series of hypothetical questions that they answered on a seven point scale, adapted specifically for young

children. First, the children were asked how strongly they had felt the emotion. Second, they were asked two questions regarding possible parental reactions to the emotional expression: "How do you think mom (dad) would feel toward you if you told her (him) how mad you feel?" and "How do you think mom (dad) would act toward you if you told her (him) how mad you feel?" Lastly, the children were queried as to their likelihood of expressing the emotion to a parent: "How much do you think you'd tell your mom (dad) how mad you feel?" The findings indicated that there was a high correlation between children's expectancies regarding parental response and their reported likelihood of expressing anger or sadness. This directly supports the notion that children learn to dissimulate negative emotions in order to avoid potentially difficult social consequences.

These two studies certainly establish the importance of expectancies for children's acquisition of display rules. However, they only scratch the surface of the phenomenon and open the door to a host of other significant questions. In the next few sections, we will begin to consider the literature with the specific intent of posing some new research questions and formulating the broad conceptual goals of our present study.

Age of acquisition. The astute reader will have noted that our friend Max had just enjoyed his fourth birthday before the incident of his now infamous fall. He is significantly younger than the typical subject in the grand majority of display rule research. The existing literature on display rule acquisition has generally targeted children from 6 to 13 years of age. Several researchers have found that children's awareness of display rules increases throughout this developmental span (Saarni, 1979; Harris, 1985; Weiner & Handel, 1985; Underwood, Coie & Herbsman, 1992). In general, children in

this age range begin to more fully appreciate the distinction between apparent and felt emotion and develop more elaborate strategies for regulating their emotional displays (Harris, 1985). Display rules develop in conjunction with social-cognitive skills in reasoning about emotion and others' perspectives (Saarni, 1985). Since these cognitive skills emerge during middle childhood, the existing literature has focused on this period as critical for display rule acquisition. Using the narrative methodology, most have failed to find any evidence of display rule competence in the 6-7 year age range; therefore, little effort has gone into studying this phenomenon among preschool children, such as Max.

The demand characteristics of the common display rule design may preclude the possibility of finding usage among preschoolers. The typical study requires children to reason abstractly about hypothetical situations; this demand may surpass preschooler's cognitive capabilities. However, it may be the case that these young children do employ display rules without being able to fully articulate how they do so. Research on the spontaneous control of facial expressions among preschoolers sheds some light on this possibility (Cole, 1986). Rather than asking children to reason about hypothetical situations, these studies orchestrated an actual emotional experience and then observed their reactions. The results indicated that these children did attempt to control the expression of negative emotions and that girls did so more than boys. For instance, girls smiled more and bigger, fuller smiles than boys when receiving a disappointing gift. So it may be that preschool children tacitly use some display rules but cannot yet reason about them in complex ways.

Even if preschoolers cannot fully appreciate the subtleties of dissembling felt emotions, they may still harbor expectations regarding the potential consequences of

emotional expression. Both Fuchs and Thelen (1988) and Saarni (1987) only studied expectations among school-aged children. Fuchs and Thelen (1988) found that overall outcome expectancies for the expression of negative emotions became more unfavorable with age. However, we cannot ascertain from their data if the youngest children in their sample (6 year-olds) represented the absolute bottom of the range of these expectations. It is possible that preschool children may hold more favorable expectations for expressing anger and sadness than comparable 6 year-olds.

Given these considerations, one of the goals of the present study is to extend the age range under investigation downward to include preschool-aged children. In order to effectively assess the abilities of these young children, care will be taken to minimize the cognitive demands of the procedures. Although a traditional narrative methodology will be employed, each story will be concurrently illustrated with felt puppets and props on a large felt-board. The children will chose interchangeable emotional faces for the puppets to express their expectancies. Puppets impose less processing demands than more representational stimuli and have been used successfully with preschool children (Denham, 1986; Ridley, Vaughn & Wittman, 1982).

Since we hope to make some developmental hypotheses relevant to display rule acquisition, we will compare our preschoolers to early grade-school children. The two age groups will thus overlap the bottom of the age range typically studied while also extending it downward by about 3 years. This allows us a closer view of what may be the developmental onset of children's negative outcome expectancies for emotional expression. The choice of these particular age groups will also acquire additional relevance as we consider our next set of research questions.

Potential socialization agents. The two existing studies on children's expectancies regarding their expressive behaviors (i.e. Fuchs & Thelen, 1988; Saarni, 1987) both focus exclusively on how a child's parent might react to a given display. An intuitive reading of Max's story seems to implicate his peers as the most pertinent audience to what might have been an extended episode of crying. Max seems most interested in how his pals, Manny and Owen, might react to a crying fit. Substantial theoretical and research justification exists for speculating that peers may be important agents in the early socialization of emotions. We will begin with a little of both from a different but related corner of developmental psychology, which nonetheless has clear relevance to our topic.

Parker and Gottman's (1989) monograph on children's conversations in early childhood presents a characterization of young children's social lives that highlights the increasing influence of peer reactions to emotional displays. They report on a series of observational studies of children's conversations begun in 1975 with the goal of understanding friendship formation and maintenance. The conversational processes that were salient to childhood friendships changed developmentally. These conversational processes developed concurrently with the particular social tasks on which children were focused. The children's conversations suggested that their friendships were important factors in the socialization of their emotional behaviors. Particularly relevant to our concerns, their friendships helped them acquire unique information about their own emotional experiences and the probable responses of their peers. Parker and Gottman theorized that this information about their peers' reactions helped shape their subsequent

expressive behaviors. Their data clearly affirm that peers may indeed be important socialization agents in the acquisition of emotional display rules.

Furthermore, Parker and Gottman went on to propose a developmental model of the relationship between peer relations and emotional expression in children. Their model contrasts the social-developmental tasks of early childhood with those of middle and later childhood. Peers in early childhood are focused on coordinating play to maximize their enjoyment and satisfaction. They are increasingly attempting cooperative play scenarios which necessitate managing the inevitable conflicts between participants. Children at this age must learn to regulate their emotional states and expressions or else they may destabilize a fragile play situation. This is particularly challenging for preschoolers because their emotions are still quite labile and overwhelming (Maccoby, 1980). The emotional experiences, which inevitably accompany social interactions, quickly dominate their attention and easily disorganize their behavior. Their primary emotional task thus involves learning to inhibit certain actions, such as emotional expressions, which might interrupt their highly valued social play. This includes coping with the frustration of their goals and the delay of gratification. You simply cannot always get your way in coordinated play, and preschoolers are focused on learning to manage their emotional reactions to cope with this hard fact.

By middle childhood, children move beyond these basic inhibitory tasks and begin to be concerned with displaying emotions in an appropriate social context. Entry into school exposes children to complex social changes such as sex segregation and emerging power hierarchies. They encounter more varied peer statuses and personalities, and the sheer number of social contacts increases dramatically. In these more challenging

social situations, school-aged children focus on gleaning the attitudes and predicting the reactions of their peers. The importance of peer groups begins to rival that of parents at this age (Markus & Nurius, 1984; Maccoby, 1980). Social comparisons among peers increase as well as the desire for belonging and acceptance. By necessity, children become more knowledgeable about the social forces acting on behaviors, and the benefits of behaving in accordance. For emotional development, this means that school-aged children become preoccupied with abstracting display rules from their peers' reactions. Cognitively, they employ their newfound "operational" thinking to extract various "cut and dry" rules of social behavior. Their conversational topics center around what they consider "uncool" and who got stared at for inappropriate behavior; they reveal a preoccupation with embarrassment which becomes a frequent topic of gossip.

Parker and Gottman's characterization of middle childhood attitudes toward emotions receives some support from the display rule literature. One interview study queried children, aged 7 to 13 years-old, about the people to whom they would be most likely to express their real emotions (Saarni, 1989). The younger children, in middle childhood, preferred adults to peers because they feared peer derision and thought adults more trustworthy. This finding confirms this age group's preoccupation with managing their emotional displays in the face of potentially negative peer reactions.

Parker and Gottman's proposed sequence of social development has clear implications for our hypotheses about the emergence of expectancies regarding emotional expression. In terms of our proposed age groups, it suggests that school-aged children would be more aware of display rules and the expectations that accompany them than preschoolers would. In addition, school-aged children would likely have more elaborate

expectancies regarding the reactions of their peers to displays of emotions, particularly the negative ones involving peer derision and embarrassment. It is possible that preschool children already have acquired negative expectancies regarding certain emotional expressions but they will probably focus more around the reactions of parents than those of peers.

Types of emotional expression. Ask most people in our culture to categorize the types of emotions and they will probably start by saying that there are the “bad” ones and the “good” ones. It seems that the emotions of anger, sadness, or fear are experienced as problematic and unpleasant whereas those of happiness, joy, and excitement are almost by definition desirable experiences. Many display rule researchers have concluded that the “bad” or “negative” emotions are subjected to earlier and more intense socialization pressure than the “positive” ones (e.g. Saarni, 1987; Reichenbach & Masters, 1983). Socially, the negative emotions can involve substantial interpersonal vulnerability and may even lead to physical harm. It is logical to assume that these emotions would require early social regulation in the form of prohibitive display rules. They may be among the first emotions to bring about unfavorable social consequences and thus contribute to the formation of negative expectancies. Even very young children (2-3 years) spontaneously offer justifications for angry or aggressive displays, recognizing the likelihood of imminent socialization pressure (Miller & Sperry, 1987). There is also some evidence that infants are aware that negative emotions are responded to less favorably than positive ones (Malatesta & Haviland, 1982).

Given these factors, we chose to focus our study of young children's expectancies exclusively on the negative emotions of anger, sadness and fear. This will allow us to compare our findings more directly to those of Fuchs and Thelen (1988) who also studied expectancies regarding anger and sadness. Our choice of these particular negative emotions will also take on additional significance as we continue our discussion.

Social context factors. Display rules are more complex than simple blanket prohibitions regarding a certain emotion. They invariably contain implicit references to the specific social contexts within which it is inappropriate to express a given emotion. In Max's story, his expressive behavior may have been quite different if only his teacher had been present to witness his fall or if he had fallen at home alone. Salient social context factors can include, but are not limited to: who is present for an emotional display, toward whom the display is directed, the public or private nature of the setting, and the nature of the eliciting event. All of these factors influence the pertinence of various display rules and, by extrapolation, the expectancies which underlie them. Saarni's (1987) study of expectancies underscores the subtlety of the social context variables children can appreciate. There, children were aware of who was made vulnerable by a given emotional display. Their subsequent outcome expectancies reflected a differential application of display rules according to this criterion.

In our present study, we will attempt to uncover some other social criteria that might affect children's expectations regarding the outcomes of emotional expression. Since anger is arguably the most problematic and difficult emotion for young children to regulate, we will focus on exploring some important social context variables associated

with the expression of this emotion. Our focus will include two specific social dimensions of angry expressions which emerge from the literature as potentially relevant to the invocation of display rules: the status of the target of anger and the intention behind an anger-provoking act.

a) Status. Various display rule studies with older grade-school children indicate that differential status is an important criterion for determining the appropriateness of expressing anger (Underwood, Coie, & Herbsman, 1992; Karniol & Heiman, 1987; Dodge, 1986). Children find it difficult to express anger directly toward authority figures such as teachers or parents. They are quite aware of the status differential between adults and peers and they adapt their expression of anger appropriately. They frequently report that they are more likely to express sadness rather than anger in situations where a teacher is their antagonist instead of another child. Children have little recourse in anger toward an adult target; because of the status differential, they cannot retaliate as they might choose to do with a peer. With peers, the expression of anger is more likely to have a real impact and hence seems a more feasible alternative. Acknowledging their anger toward an powerful adult seems inherently more dangerous and less socially acceptable to them. Thus, understandably, children report a greater use of display rules for anger with adults than with peers.

Not only do grade-school children inhibit their expressions of anger but they also use different behavioral strategies when confronted with a high-status figure who provokes their anger (Underwood, Coie, & Herbsman, 1992; Karniol & Heiman, 1987). Their reported responses to adult-provoked anger tend to be more passive than in

identical situations with peer-provoked anger. When adults provoke their anger, children report behaviors such as compliance, verbal persuasion, or simply being bitter. When peers provoke their anger, they mention aggression, retaliation, yelling and swearing as typical responses. In general, their strategies with peers are more confrontational and assertive than with adults.

In light of these findings, we would predict that young children's expectancies regarding the expression of anger would be more negative when the provocateur was an adult as opposed to an equal status peer. Even preschoolers, such as Max, may be aware of this most salient social dimension when making judgments about the potential ramifications of an angry display. The next social context variable we will consider is significantly more subtle and may elude the still-emerging social awareness of preschool-aged children.

b) Intentionality. Suppose, for a moment, that Max had been jostled by his pal, Manny, and then eaten the asphalt, as it were. His emotional reaction to this event, as well as his subsequent expression, might have been quite different. As adults, we would be concerned to ascertain whether our friend had jostled us on purpose or inadvertently. This information would be important in shaping what we believed to be an appropriate response to the event. If Manny had malevolently pushed us into the ground, we would likely feel justified in getting quite angry with him and not hiding that fact. If, however, the whole incident had been an accident, we might still feel angry with our friend, but would likely feel a compulsion to not express it. In other words, the intent of a provocateur mediates the appropriateness of an expression of anger.

As intent is an internal and unseen aspect of another person's inner world, this particular dimension of our cultural display rules for anger may be somewhat difficult for young children to appreciate and thus incorporate into their expectancies. Preoperational children's cognitive capacities lack certain perspective-taking abilities that are essential to understanding the reality of another's motivational states (Piaget & Inhelder, 1967). These abilities may not mature sufficiently until the onset of concrete operations, during the grade school years.

Piaget (1965) was the first to suggest that young children may only gradually come to comprehend the intentional states of others. In his now classic moral judgment interviews, he presented children, 6 to 12 years of age, with pairs of stories about childish transgressions and asked them to judge which was naughtier and why. One story described a good intentioned transgression with a large amount of damage; the other an ill-intentioned transgression with a small amount of damage. He found that his youngest children ignored the intentionality information and based their morality judgments exclusively on the extent of material damage. Most of Piaget's stories, however, did not systematically compare accidental with intentional damage.

Later moral judgment research has elaborated on Piaget's original findings. One study exposed children to films involving an actor who intentionally or accidentally harmed another (Berndt & Berndt, 1975). In making their moral judgments of the actor, preschoolers focused on the consequences of his acts and ignored references to intentionality. Conversely, the grade school children used intentionality as the main evaluative criterion. In a similar study, children 5-11 years-old heard stories in which negative and positive intentions, as well as consequences, were systematically varied