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by child care teachers**

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## The socialization of compassionate behavior by child care teachers

The present study examined how child care teachers' socialization practices and child characteristics jointly predict children's sympathetic-prosocial responding. A total of 25 teachers of 105 five-year-old children were observed during free play with regard to their warmth, non-directiveness and passivity-activity. The children's reactions to distress simulations in two different situations were observed. The children's inhibition and aggression were rated by teachers and parents. More compassionate behavior was shown by girls as compared to boys and by children in classes with warmer teachers; inhibited children showed tendentially less sympathetic-prosocial reactions than non-inhibited children. Furthermore, girls who showed sympathetic-prosocial reactions were rated as more aggressive than girls who did not, and boys who showed sympathetic-prosocial behavior as compared to those who did not were in classes with warmer teachers. The data suggest that child characteristics as well as socialization practices play an important role in children's interpersonal functioning. Among the teacher variables, their ability to interact in a warm, affectionate way is of central importance for the development of emotional competence in children.

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To be emotionally competent means to *demonstrate self-efficacy in emotion-eliciting social transactions* (Saarni, 1997, p. 38). One typical emotion-eliciting social situation is the distress of another person. The capacity to respond sympathetically and prosocially to this distress may be one of the most important components of interpersonal functioning (Eisenberg, 1998; Howes, Matheson, & Hamilton, 1994; Saarni, 1997).

*Sympathy* consists of feelings of concern or sorrow for another based on the recognition of another's emotional state or situation. Eisenberg and colleagues have obtained evidence for the assertion that people prone to dispositional sympathy are well regulated, emotionally and behaviorally (Eisenberg, Fabes, Murphy, et al., 1996; Eisenberg & Okun, 1996). In contrast, they found that *personal distress*, defined as a self-focused, aversive emotional reaction based on the recognition of another's emotional state or situation, is related to low scores in regulation and high scores of negative emotion (Eisenberg et al., 1994; Eisenberg & Okun, 1996).

*Prosocial behavior* is defined as voluntary behavior intended to benefit another (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998, p. 702). The empirical evidence from many studies conducted during the last 15 years supports the view that sympathy and prosocial behavior are positively intertwined, whereas personal distress seems to hinder the occurrence of helping (Batson, 1991; Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998; Kienbaum, 1993; Trommsdorff, 1995).

The present study was conducted within the framework of the "Augsburg Model of Emotional Development" (Ulich, 2000; Ulich, Kienbaum, & Volland, 1999). This model postulates individual differences in profiles of emotional reactivity, similar to the cognitive-affective system theory of personality described by Mischel & Shoda (1995). Here, we were interested in whether the interactions between personality (inhibition, aggressiveness, gender) and socialization practices of child care teachers (warmth, directiveness) would be meaningfully related to the compassionate behavior of 5-year-old children.

What do we know about the ways adult socializers influence children's responses to emotionally evocative situations? Most research has concentrated on *mothers* as socializers. Positive associations have been found between sympathy and a secure attachment relationship (Kestenbaum, Farber, & Sroufe, 1989), maternal modeling of sympathetic emotions and prosocial behavior (Fabes, Eisenberg, & Miller, 1990), parental encouragement of children's expression of emotion (Eisenberg, Fabes, Schaller, Carlo, & Miller, 1991) and an inductive child-rearing-style (Krevans & Gibbs, 1996; Zahn-Waxler, Radke-Yarrow, & King, 1979).

Much less is known about young children's relationships with other important people in their lives, such as their preschool and early elementary school teachers. This is a particularly unfortunate state of affairs given the fact that increasing numbers of women work outside the house and more children attend some kind of preschool. Thus, it seems urgent to extend our knowledge about the effects of teacher-child relationships on the emotional competence of children (Birch & Ladd, 1998; Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998; Kontos & Wilcox-Herzog, 1997; Pianta, Nimetz, & Bennett, 1997; White & Howe, 1998).

In the present study, we focused on two aspects of the teacher-child relationship: the quality of the *affective relationships* teachers form with the children and the amount of *directive behavior* they use in interaction with the children. The importance of the affective relationships between teachers and children has been demonstrated in studies that were conducted within the framework of attachment theory. Children classified as securely attached to their teachers were found to be more prosocial (Mitchell-Copeland, Denham, & DeMulder, 1997) and more socially competent with unfamiliar peers (Howes et al., 1994) than children classified as having an insecure relationship with their teachers. Additionally, Birch and Ladd (1998) found that the prosocial behavior of kindergartners correlated positively with teacher-child closeness and negatively with teacher-child conflict. Further, conflict in the teacher-child relationship was associated with a decline in children's prosocial behavior one year later. Likewise, Howes (2000) found that prosocial ratings of second graders were related to contemporary high levels of child-teacher closeness and low levels of child-teacher conflict.

One major problem in all these studies is that they rely almost entirely on teacher-reports for the measure of teacher-child relationship. In the present study, we tried to capture the affective relationship between teacher and children by *observing* the child care teacher's warmth in interaction with the children. Data relating educator warmth and socioemotional development is scant to non-existent, but White and Howe (1998, p. 87) cite several studies indicating that the teacher's degree of warmth and sensitivity can play an important role in facilitating children's socioemotional development. For example, Peisner-Feinberg and Burchinal (1997) revealed modest, but highly significant correlations between teacher sensitivity and preschoolers' sociability. Pianta and Steinberg (1992) found that preschoolers described as competent by their mothers had relationships with teachers characterized by warmth, openness and a lack of conflict. Therefore, we hypothesized that the more warmly the teacher behaves, the better the quality of the teacher-child relationship would be and the more sympathetic-prosocial reactions the children should show.

*Directive behavior* refers to the way the teacher exerts power in his or her interaction with the children. Highly directive behavior is characterized by controlling, prescribing, instructing, manipulating, and forbidding (Tausch & Tausch, 1991). The children have few opportunities to act and decide for themselves. There is some empirical evidence that high levels of directive behavior prevent the occurrence of prosocial behavior. Observations in preschool show that teachers very quickly intervene when a child is in distress and that they rarely reinforce or encourage children's prosocial behavior (Caplan, 1993; Caplan & Hay, 1989; Eisenberg, Cameron, Tryon, & Dodez, 1981). Children do not intervene because they think they are not supposed to do so and because they rarely have the opportunity, as the teachers act immediately. Thus, we hypothesized that the more directive behavior a teacher shows, the less sympathetic-prosocial reactions on the part of a child should occur.

Nevertheless, non-directive behavior can be exerted in two very different ways: the teacher can just passively let the children act without being really interested, or he or she can actively join the children by giving help or advice whenever they need it. For example, children might ask the teacher to help them make a tower of wooden blocks higher. They say: "We can't do it ourselves." The teacher can either go and built the tower higher herself (directive behavior) or she can say "but you can do that on your own," (passive non-directiveness) or she can help the children find several solutions by asking "how do you want the tower to look like? Who has an idea? Now we've got three ideas, how do you want to do it now?" (active non-directiveness; example from Schmid, 2000, p. 157). We hypothesized that only active non-directiveness would be positively correlated with sympathetic-prosocial behavior.

Last but not least, the relationship between teacher and child is not only formed by the teacher, but by the child as well. Child characteristics like sex and temperament influence the way adults behave towards the particular child. Therefore, we included two dimensions of child personality: *Inhibition toward strangers* (Asendorpf, 1993) and *aggression*. Inhibition toward strangers describes the tendency of children to become inhibited when encountering a new environment, a novel object, or a stranger. It is characterized by an approach-avoiding conflict, that is, the children would like to communicate with the unknown person but are afraid to do so at the same time. We assumed that children who are inhibited toward strangers and who witness the misfortune of a relatively unfamiliar person should be more aroused than non-inhibited children and therefore should show fewer sympathetic-prosocial reactions, for they will be more concerned with coping with their own emotions than with the other person. The empirical evidence existing so far supports this hypothesis. Young, Fox, and Zahn-

Waxler (1999) found negative relations between empathy and inhibition toward an unfamiliar adult, but not toward the mother. They concluded that inhibition may have an impact on children's empathy in unfamiliar contexts. Eisenberg and colleagues (Eisenberg, Fabes, Karbon, et al., 1996) examined the relations of schoolchildren's comforting behavior to empathy-related reactions and shyness. They found that comforting was negatively related to younger children's shyness and marginally, positively correlated with girls' vagal tone (high vagal tone is supposed to be a marker of uninhibited behavior). Further, girls who were shy tended to report low levels of situational and dispositional sympathy, and shy young boys tended to exhibit high levels of heart rate acceleration during an empathy film. Thus, across different ways of measuring, shyness is related to a lack of sympathy and prosocial behavior.

Another important personality trait is aggression. However, it is not easy to predict the relations between aggression and sympathetic-prosocial reactions. Although intuitively it seems that aggression as a trait should hinder compassionate behavior, a certain degree of aggression may be indicative of assertiveness rather than hostility, especially for children who are relatively non-aggressive overall, for example, girls as compared to boys. Assertive children are relatively high in sympathy and prosocial behavior (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998, p. 737). Therefore, we assumed a positive relation between aggression and sympathetic-prosocial behaviors for girls and a negative one for boys, assuming sex differences in aggression.

Finally, a child is not simply inhibited or not or aggressive or not, but he or she interacts in an environment that may be more or less accepting of these behaviors. Several authors have underlined the importance of taking into account the interactions between child personality and socialization influences (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998; Kochanska, 1993; Radke-Yarrow & Zahn-Waxler, 1986; Rubin, 1993). In line with this argument, we planned a design that forced us "... to think about the ways various predictors of prosocial responding interact in their potential influence..." (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998, p. 756). We studied the interactions of child characteristics and the caregiving styles of teachers in order to determine if specific temperament types require specific caregiving practices to enhance the development of emotional competence.

In summary, we expected the children's sympathetic-prosocial reactions to be related (1) positively to the child care teacher's warmth; (2) negatively to child care teacher's directive behavior; (3) positively to child care teacher's active non-directiveness; (4)

negatively to inhibition and (5) negatively to aggression for boys and positively to aggression for girls.

## Method

### *The German system of early care and education*

The German preschool and school system is different in some respect from those of North America. Children usually enter preschool (known as “kindergarten”) at an age of 3-4 years and remain in the *same* class with the same teachers for two or three years; when they are six years old, formal schooling begins. Group size is about 25 children; in each group, there is usually one primary and one assistant teacher. In order to become a primary teacher, one has to complete two years of practicum in different centers, then go to a teacher training college for two years and then complete a one-year practicum. Assistant teachers go to another type of college for two years and complete a short practicum during this time. There is no uniform curriculum in German kindergartens, but the vast majority provide “free play” in the morning from 8 until about 10 o'clock. During this time, no guided activities take place, and children might eat breakfast and play. The term “teacher“ in this study refers to primary teachers only.

### *Participants*

A total of 105 five-year-old children participated (mean age 66.6 months,  $SD = 3.3$  months, 41 girls, 64 boys) from 5 child care-centers in and around Augsburg, a town with 250,000 residents in Southern Germany. One hundred of the children were observed in the sympathy-eliciting situation called “pain,” 101 in the situation called “balloon,” and 103 of the children participated in at least one of the two situations. A total of 25 teachers were observed during free play, and 93 parents answered a questionnaire about their child's characteristics. All of the children were German native speakers and came from predominantly middle-class families. Mothers' level of education was: 24 % lower level (9-10 years of schooling); 51 % middle level (10 years of schooling); 25 % higher level (at least 12 years of schooling). The teachers averaged 10.5 years of experience, ranging from 0.6 to 22 years. They were 25 to 57 years old (mean 36.3 years). The children had been with their particular teachers from three to 33 months ( $M = 22.2$  months,  $SD = 7.8$  months).

### *Measures and Procedures*

Data collection took place in several phases, with sympathy assessments first and classroom observations last. The time that elapsed between observations of children and

teachers ranged from two weeks to 14 weeks (mean five weeks). In between, mothers and child care teachers filled out the questionnaires.

*Sympathy assessments.* We collected two observational measures of sympathy by means of distress simulation procedures, similar to those used in the research group of Trommsdorff (Kienbaum, 1993; Kienbaum & Trommsdorff, 1999; Trommsdorff, Friedlmeier, & Kienbaum, 1991). The simulation procedure took place in the kindergarten in a separate room. We observed how the children reacted to the distress of a puppet in two situations. This puppet was about 60 cm tall and was manipulated by a trained student (for other investigations where puppets were used successfully see Roberts & Strayer, 1987, or Oppenheim, Emde, & Warren, 1997). In the first situation, called “pain,” child and puppet were sitting together drawing pictures. When the puppet decided to stand up and get some new crayons, she bumped into a chair and feigned injury for 30 seconds, followed by 30 seconds in which there was a gradual subsiding of the distress. In the second situation, called “balloon,” child and puppet played with two balloons that had been blown up before and then watched a film of five minutes duration together. During the film, the balloon of the puppet popped and she again cried for 30 seconds, followed by 30 seconds in which there was a gradual subsiding of the distress. The sympathetic-prosocial reactions of the child were videotaped by two cameras and coded by four trained, independent observers on a scale from 0 (does not occur at all) to 3 (very strong). The criteria used for the evaluations were similar to those used by Eisenberg, McCreath, and Ahn (1988, p. 303) as well as those used in other research groups (Kienbaum, 1993, p. 69; Trommsdorff et al., 1991). Sympathetic-prosocial reactions were coded when the child interrupted his/her activity, softened his/her face, oriented towards the puppet by looking at it and talking to it in a soft comforting voice and/or caressing the puppet. Interrater reliability was established for the whole sample by means of Spearman rank-order correlations<sup>1</sup>; the scores were highly significant (for “pain”  $r = .88$  and for “balloon”  $r = .90$ ,  $ps < .001$ ). Discrepancies between ratings were decided in conference. The final rating was the conferenced rating. Stability was computed by correlating sympathetic-prosocial reactions between the two situations “pain” and “balloon,” the resulting coefficient was  $r(98) = .57$ ,  $p < .01$ . The scores of the two situations were averaged for all further analyses.

*Teacher's behavior toward the children.* The teachers of the children in kindergarten were observed during 2 weeks on 4 different days during free play for 45 minutes each time

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<sup>1</sup> If not mentioned otherwise, the correlations reported in this article are Spearman rank correlations.

(c.f. Kienbaum, 1999). Two trained observers evaluated the quality of the emotional relationship on a 5-point scale (1 = unfriendly, distanced, emotionally cold behavior to 5 = friendly, devoted, emotionally warm behavior). During each 45-minute visit, this rating was carried out twice. The resulting eight values for each teacher were averaged (standard deviations ranged from  $SD = 0$  to  $SD = 1.12$ , mean  $SD = .51$ ). Interobserver reliability was high ( $r = .92$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The amount of warmth teachers showed ranged from scale point 2 to scale point 4.5, with a mean of 3.14. It was not different for girls or boys ( $t(103) = -.54$ , n.s.), for inhibited or not-inhibited children ( $t(103) = -.67$ , n.s.) or for aggressive as compared to non-aggressive children ( $t(103) = .85$ , n.s.). Likewise, teachers above or below the median in warmth did not differ in rating children's inhibition ( $t(103) = 1.23$ , n.s.) or aggression ( $t(103) = 1.09$ , n.s.).

Next, observers rated the degree of non-directive behavior on a 4-point scale (1 = children have no possibilities to act and decide for themselves to 4 = children can act and decide for themselves). Interobserver reliability was high ( $r = .97$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

One more rating had to be made if a teacher got a score of 3 or 4 on this non-directiveness scale, that is, when he or she was seen as giving children many opportunities to act and decide for themselves. In this case, the rater had to decide on another 4-point scale, whether this was done by just passively letting the children act (scale point 1) versus actively joining them (scale point 4). Interobserver reliability was  $r = .95$ ,  $p < .001$ . The resulting eight values were averaged. If a person got a score of 1 or 2 on non - directiveness, she got a "0" on passivity – activity.

*Child characteristics: Inhibition.* A total of 93 parents answered a questionnaire that included two groups of four questions designed by Asendorpf (1993) to be rated on a 7-point scale (never to always); four referred to inhibition to adult strangers and four parallel questions referred to inhibition toward peer strangers (e.g. "my child is shy toward unknown adults;" "my child is shy toward unknown peers"). The internal consistency for the 8-item scale was Cronbach's alpha = .91 (c.f. Kienbaum, 1999). The 8 items were randomly distributed among 24 other items of the same response format.

The child care teachers completed the German short form of the Teacher-Temperament Questionnaire of Thomas & Chess (1977; German translation from Ulich & Mayr, 1997). Shyness was measured by seven items on a 7-point scale (almost never to almost always). The items pertaining to shyness were "child is shy with adults he/she doesn't know," "child will initially avoid new games and activities, preferring to sit on the side and

watch,” “child takes a long time to become comfortable in a new physical location (e.g. different classroom, new seat, etc.),” “child plunges into new activities and situations without hesitation (-),” “child takes a long time to become comfortable in a new situation,” “child will get up and perform before the class (sing, recite, etc.) with no hesitation, even the first time (-),” “child is bashful when meeting new children.” The internal consistency for the teacher’s shyness-scale was Cronbach’s alpha = .90. Since the two shyness scales were intercorrelated ( $r = .41, p < .001$ ), they were z-transformed and averaged, yielding a single index for children’s inhibition ( $\alpha = .94$ ).

*Child characteristics: Aggression.* The parents answered four more questions, referring to aggression, in the same questionnaire (“my child is aggressive towards other children;” “my child teases other children;” “my child starts to quarrel with other children;” when my child is playing with other children, it easily flies into a rage”). Cronbach’s alpha was .84. The child care teachers answered the following items pertaining to aggression (the questionnaire was the same as for shyness): “When child can’t have or do something he/she wants, child becomes annoyed or upset,” “child becomes easily upset when he/she loses a game,” “if another child has a toy he/she wants, this child will easily accept a substitute (-),” “when playing with other children this child argues with them,” “child complains to teacher about other children,” “child lets other children know when he/she does not like something by yelling or fighting.” The internal consistency for the aggression scale was Cronbach’s alpha = .87. The two aggression scales were intercorrelated ( $r(93) = .34, p < .001$ ). They were z-transformed and averaged for all further analyses ( $\alpha = .85$ ).

## Results

The research findings are organized as follows: (a) Means of the predictor variables are presented as a function of sympathetic-prosocial reactions; (b) intercorrelations for the predictor variables (teachers’ caregiving-style, inhibition, aggression) are presented; and (c) the combined effect of personality and caregiving style is examined by means of a logistic regression analysis. Because there were 55 children out of 103 who did not show any sympathetic-prosocial reactions, the variable was dichotomized.

As Table 1 shows, of the 40 participating girls, 27 showed and 13 did not show sympathetic-prosocial reactions, whereas of the 63 boys, the ratio was 21 to 42. The difference was highly significant ( $\chi^2(1) = 11.5; p < .001$ ). Further, the comparison of the groups with and without sympathetic-prosocial reactions revealed that the children from the

first group were tendentially less inhibited ( $t(101) = 1.72, p < .10$ ) and had warmer teachers ( $t(101) = -1.72, p < .10$ ). Sympathetic girls were more aggressive than non-sympathetic girls ( $t(38) = -2.07, p < .05$ ), and sympathetic boys had warmer teachers than non-sympathetic boys ( $t(61) = -2.05, p < .05$ ).<sup>2</sup>

Table 1  
Mean Values for Predictor Variables as a Function of Sympathetic- Prosocial Reactions

	Symp. - prosocial reactions			No symp.- prosocial reactions		
	Total	Girls	Boys	Total	Girls	Boys
N	48	27	21	55	13	42
Inhibition <sup>a</sup>	-0.20	-0.24	-0.15	0.08	-0.16	0.15
Aggression <sup>a</sup>	-0.07	-0.11	-0.02	0.01	-0.65	0.21
Teachers` warmth <sup>b</sup>	3.26	3.14	3.41	3.07	3.06	3.07
Teachers` non-directiveness <sup>c</sup>	2.19	2.16	2.24	2.22	2.36	2.17
Teachers` passivity-activity <sup>c</sup>	2.07	1.96	2.24	2.02	2.12	1.99

Note. For passivity-activity, n=39 children (9 girls, 30 boys) belong to the group without and n=35 children (21 girls, 14 boys) to the group with sympathetic-prosocial reactions.

<sup>a</sup> z-transformed; <sup>b</sup> rated on a scale of 1 to 5; <sup>c</sup> rated on a scale of 1 to 4.

Subsequently, correlational analyses were performed to examine the association between the predictor variables (teachers` caregiving-style, inhibition, aggression). Table two shows that the variables concerning teachers` caregiving style were all positively intercorrelated, and a low positive correlation between inhibition and aggression was found.

<sup>2</sup> With regard to the whole sample, girls as compared to boys were rated as tendentially less inhibited ( $t(103) = -1.80, p < .10$ ) and less aggressive ( $t(103) = -2.64, p < .01$ ).

Table 2  
Intercorrelations among Predictor Variables<sup>3</sup>

Measure	1	2	3	4	5
1. Teachers` warmth					
2. Teachers` non-directiveness	.40*** (105)				
3. Teachers` passivity-activity	.67*** (75)	.60*** (75)			
4. Inhibition	-.08 (105)	.01 (105)	-.10 (75)		
5. Aggression	-.15 (105)	-.15 (105)	-.14 (75)	.22* (105)	--

Note. Pearson Correlations. \* $p < .05$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ . Number of participants in parentheses.

In order to examine the combined effect of personality and caregiving style, a logistic regression analyses was computed (Table 3). In order to avoid problems of multicollinearity, we dropped the variables non-directiveness and passivity-activity from this analysis. First, the four predictor variables (sex, inhibition, aggression, warmth,) were entered, followed by the two-way interactions between the personality variables (sex, inhibition, aggression) and caregiving style (warmth). A stepwise method (backward Wald) was used. The overall percent of correct classification was 69 percent ( $-2 \log \text{likelihood} = 117.55$ ; goodness of fit = 100.03).

Table 3  
Logistic Regression Analysis Predicting Children`s Sympathetic-Prosocial Reactions (N= 103)

Variable	<u>B</u>	<u>SE</u>	Exp (B)	Wald	Sig.
Inhibition	-0.40	0.29	0.67	1.96	.16
Warmth	0.84	0.42	2.32	4.04	.04
Sex X Aggression	1.57	0.65	4.80	5.85	.02
Sex X Warmth	0.66	0.18	1.93	13.02	.00

Note. The variables “sex,” “aggression,” “sex x inhibition,” “inhibition x warmth,” and “aggression x warmth” were stepwise eliminated.

<sup>3</sup> Based on the number of teachers, the intercorrelations between the socialization-variables were:  $r(25) = .34$ ,  $p < .05$  for warmth and non-directiveness,  $r(17) = .74$ ,  $p < .001$  for passivity-activity and warmth and  $r(17) = .54$ ,  $p < .05$  for passivity-activity and non-directiveness.

The logistic regression revealed a significant main effect for warmth, a significant interaction between sex and aggression and a highly significant interaction between sex and warmth. The main effect for inhibition did not reach conventional levels of significance. Thus, the results obtained before were mainly confirmed: Children who showed compassionate behavior were in classes with warmer teachers than children who did not show sympathetic-prosocial reactions; this was especially true for the boys. Girls who were rated to be higher in aggression as compared with girls who were not showed more compassionate behavior.

### Discussion

This research was designed to examine relations between kindergarten teachers' caregiving style, and children's temperament and emotional competence, measured by their sympathetic-prosocial reactions to distress. The question was whether child characteristics and socializing practices would jointly predict children's sympathetic-prosocial responding.

The evidence suggested first of all that the girls seemed to be more emotionally competent than the boys, for they showed more sympathetic-prosocial reactions and were rated as less inhibited and less aggressive (see footnote 2). This is in line with much of the research on gender and emotion (Brody & Hall, 1993) and points to the tremendous importance of including gender in all analyses concerning emotional competence.

Second, we can conclude that child care teachers play an important role in children's emotional competence. The more warmly a teacher behaved, the more the children exhibited sympathetic-prosocial reactions. Since warmth provides children with information about themselves - that they are well-regarded, valued, and secure - they may have less need to see their social environment in exclusively self-oriented terms, and they may feel freer to show compassionate behavior towards others (Yarrow, Scott, & Zahn-Waxler, 1973). As warmth is a variable that is frequently part of the operationalization of a secure attachment relationship, this result supports the findings of studies conducted within the framework of attachment theory (Howes et al., 1994; Mitchell-Copeland et al., 1997). Further, if one views warmth as a part of a close teacher-child relationship, the results of the studies using teacher-report measures are also supported (Birch & Ladd, 1998; Howes, 2000). The finding that warmth promoted in particular the boys' compassionate behavior (the interaction of sex and warmth was highly significant) directs our attention again to the question of sex differences. Boys as compared to girls in this study were rated as more aggressive and more inhibited, or, in other

words, as more complicated. Because girls of this age generally develop faster than do boys, perhaps the latter benefit even more than the former from a warm, affectionate teacher.

Although warmth, non-directiveness and passivity-activity were all positively intercorrelated, the latter two were not related to the children's sympathetic-prosocial reactions. It is difficult to say why this was the case – maybe these variables are really not meaningful for the development of compassionate behavior in kindergarten, or maybe it would be necessary to focus on the teacher's behavior in interaction with each individual child rather than on what happens in the classroom at large for an optimal analysis of this construct. Another possibility could be that dichotomizing the outcome variable was not the optimal data analytic strategy in the sense that subtle differences could be overlooked. Anyway, the highly significant intercorrelations between the three teacher variables seem to confirm that “good things tend to go together” (Phillips & Howes, 1987, p. 3) and that these behavioral orientations deserve further attention.

Among the child characteristics, as expected, inhibition was at least tendentially higher in children who did not respond in a sympathetic-prosocial way. This finding supports and extends those of Eisenberg et al. (1996) and Young et al. (1999) concerning the negative association between empathy and shyness, although their work was conducted with children of a different age.

Aggression was higher in girls who showed a compassionate reaction as compared to girls who did not, thereby supporting the assumption that higher aggression in girls may be indicative of assertiveness rather than hostility. In this connection, it is interesting to look at the Latin roots of the word “aggression.” “Aggredi” means not only to attack but also to approach, and the latter is definitely needed for prosocial behavior. Thus, girls called “aggressive” might be just better able to approach someone else, whereas boys rated as “aggressive” seem to behave in the destructive way that is usually associated with this term.

None of the following factors (warmth, non-directiveness, and passivity-activity) moderated the relation between temperament and sympathetic-prosocial reactions. As was already discussed in the paragraph about the teacher variables, there might be several reasons for this outcome – methodological as well as theoretical — that can be resolved only by further research.

In sum, the data suggest that both child characteristics and socialization practices are influential for children's interpersonal functioning. These significant findings extend the

limited research that has been conducted in this field. We now know not only that teachers *do* matter for the development of emotional competence in children, but we can see also from this study that they may be even more important for some children than for others, as, in our sample, boys as compared to girls.

Consequently, it seems urgent to direct child care teachers' attention to the fact that children can benefit greatly from a warm, caring environment. Educational institutions such as departments or colleges of early education must be concerned about the development of these skills in teachers, since they make important and perhaps lasting contributions to children's emotional competence.

Of course our findings do not allow the prediction of long-term effects or the behavior of the children in other contexts. We do not know whether effects of the child care teachers' behavior could be also observed in the home setting, when, for example, the mother would feign injury (Howes et al., 1994). Thus, our findings clearly need to be replicated and extended. Nevertheless, we may conclude that teachers' behavior is important for the development of emotional competence in children. Our current work has been a first attempt to elucidate these factors and processes that contribute to interpersonal functioning in young children.

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