

The role of maternal reminiscing style in cognitive and socioemotional development: A meta-analysis

¹Theodore E. A. Waters, ¹Christin Köber, ¹Christopher R. Facompré, ²Robyn Fivush
¹New York University – Abu Dhabi; ²Emory University

Introduction

Maternal Reminiscing and Socioemotional Development

- Individual differences in maternal reminiscing style predict differences in children's cognitive and socioemotional development (Nelson & Fivush, 2004).
- Elaborative mothers ask children open-ended questions and elicit details with greater frequency.
- Elaborative style helps children: (re)construct coherent narrative; fosters language skills, and supports ToM.
- Maternal elaboration argued to be highly gendered, with mothers reminiscing in more elaborate ways with daughters than sons (Reese & Fivush, 1993).

The Pressing Need for Quantitative Synthesis

- The significance of maternal reminiscing on child development has been extensively studied, but has resulted in somewhat diverse research findings.
- After nearly 40 years of research, there has yet to be a quantitative summary of the literature.

Current Study

Maternal Reminiscing and Child Outcomes

- We conducted a series of meta-analyses to examine links between maternal reminiscing style and child gender, as well as three developmental outcomes: 1) autobiographical memory elaboration, 2) language, and 3) theory of mind.

Methods

Literature Search and Study Selection

- Peer-reviewed and Dissertation reports were searched using the electronic databases PsycINFO and ProQuest.
- Keywords included the following:
autobiographic, child*, convers*, elaborat*, matern*, maternal elaboration, mother*, mother child conversation, narrative, parent*, reminisce*, Theory of Mind.*
- 1,202 studies were retrieved and inspected for study relevance.
- Case studies and articles not published in the English language were excluded from our search.

Methods Cont.

Criteria for Study Inclusion

- Child mean age: 30-60 months
- Standardized assessment: Reese and Fivush (1993) elaboration coding system, or Laible (2004) global rating scale.
- Final set of studies: $N = 36$ reports, $k = 49$ samples.
 - 1,601 mother-child dyads.

Results

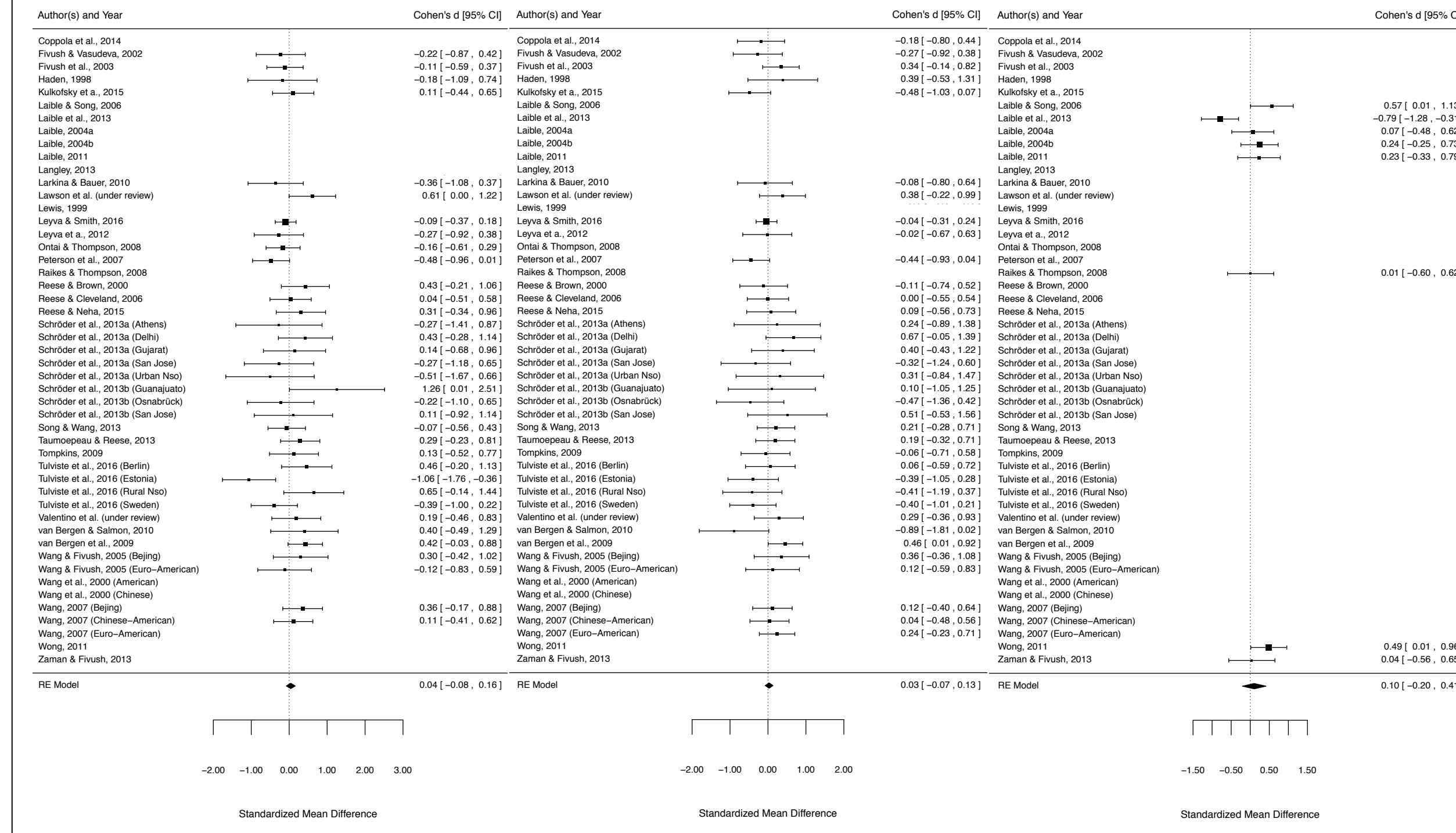
Data-Analytic Strategy

- Random-effect models using the restricted maximum-likelihood estimator were applied to fit the data (Borenstein et al., 2009).
- Study outcomes concerning child gender were computed as the standardized mean difference.
- Study outcomes regarding child elaboration, child language, and Theory of Mind were transformed into the Fisher's r -to- z .

Primary Results

- Results indicated that maternal elaborative style did not differ by child gender ($k = 35$; $d = 0.04$, 95% CI [-0.08 – 0.61]).
- Elaboration was positively associated with all other outcomes:
 - Child elaboration ($k = 36$; $r = .64$, 95% CI [0.58 – 0.70]).
 - Child language ability ($k = 17$; $r = .10$, 95% CI [.03 – .17]).
 - Child Theory of Mind ($k = 3$; $r = .22$, 95% CI [.07 – .36]).

Forest Plot - Gender



Results Cont.

Moderation

- SES, Culture (Western/non-Western), and ethnicity were examined as potential moderators.
- Ethnicity significantly moderated maternal elaborations by child gender ($Q(1) = 6.23$, $p = 0.01$).
 - Non-White mothers elaborated more with daughters than sons ($d = .23$) in comparison with White mothers ($d = -.06$).

Discussion

Summary

- Contrary to theory, results generally suggest that mothers are no more likely to elaborate with daughters than sons.
- Strong evidence linking maternal elaboration and child elaboration.
- Moderate but significant positive correlations with language ability and Theory of Mind.

Discussion

- First study to examine the magnitude of association between maternal reminiscing style and several core child outcomes.
- Elaboration may be a practiced skill, indiscriminately applied across gender, age, and context.
 - Gendered ethical/cultural differences? The need for more ethnically diverse samples.
 - Do effects hold true when controlling for emotion speech?
- Findings suggest that maternal reminiscing is most influential for child memory elaboration.
 - Might replicate effects using an independently coded conversation task to avoid potential overlap with maternal elaborations.
- Very little research has been done examining maternal elaboration and child Theory of Mind (only 4 studies identified in the literature). Necessary to replicate with additional samples.
- Most studies recruit mothers. Examining parent-child conversational style with fathers is a potentially fruitful area for future study.