

# The Role of Reflective Functioning in Understanding Parents' Emotion Socialization

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## INTRO

- Caregivers who experienced adverse events in childhood, particularly in interactions with their own parent, tend to struggle with parenting when they become a caregiver.
- Emotion socialization is the process of teaching children to understand and regulate their emotions, and has implications for their social development.
- To help children understand their emotions, caregivers must be able to see the child as motivated by intentional mental states, which is referred to as reflective functioning (RF).
- This study tested the hypothesis that caregivers who experienced invalidation or abuse in childhood would have poorer reflective functioning, which in turn would predict less responsive caregiving. Specifically, parents with poor RF would report less constructive emotion socialization strategies.

## METHODS

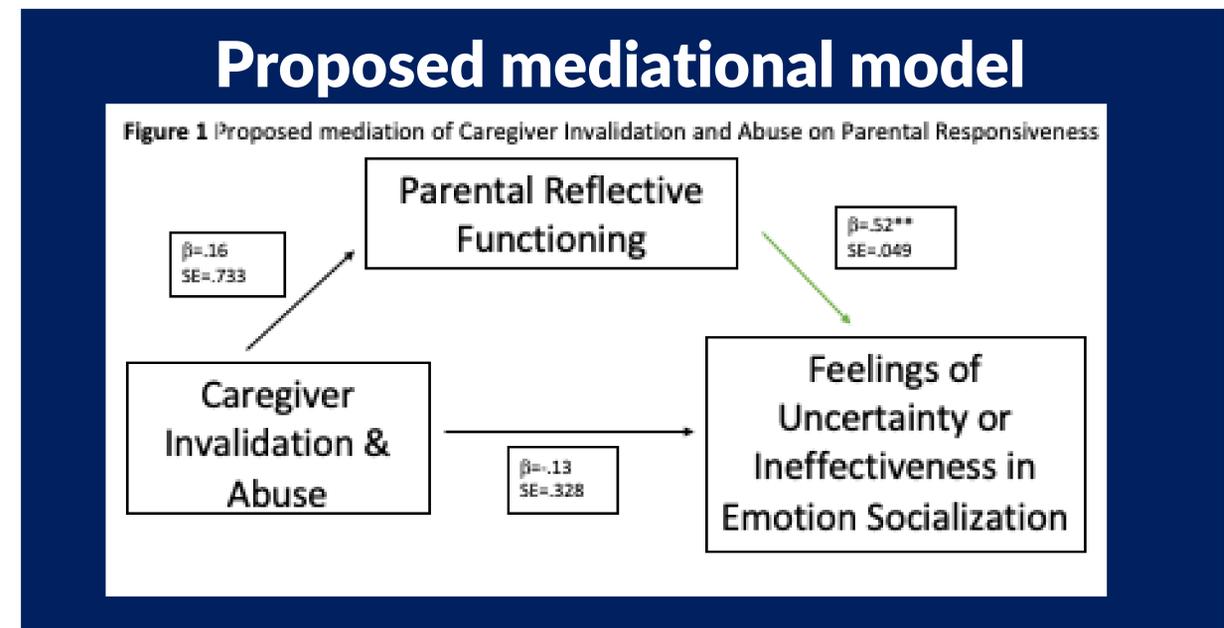
- 64 caregivers and their 3-5 year old children were recruited from Head Start preschools
- Caregivers' childhood abuse (MOPS; Parker et al., 1997) and invalidation (ICES; Mountford et al., 2004), emotion socialization (ERPS; Paterson et al., 2012) and Reflective Functioning (PRFQ; Luyten et al., 2017) were assessed with self-report questionnaires

## RESULTS

**Table 1** Descriptive statistics and correlations among caregiver experiences and parenting styles

	Emotion Related Parenting Style: Emotion Coaching	Emotion Related Parenting Style: Feelings of Uncertainty or Ineffectiveness	Parental Reflective Functioning
Caregiver Invalidation	-.05	-.12	.11
Caregiver Abuse	.09	-.12	.19
Caregiver Invalidation & Abuse	.02	-.13	.16
Parental Reflective Functioning	.02	.48**	--

\*\*correlation is significant at the .01 level



### Emotion Related Parenting Style: Emotion Coaching

- When my child is sad, we sit down and talk over the sadness
- It's important to help the child find out what caused the child's anger
- When my child is sad, I try to help the child explore what is making him or her sad
- When my child is sad, I try to help him or her figure out why the feeling is there
- When my child is angry, it's time to solve a problem

1 Always False 5 Always True

### Emotion Related Parenting Style: Feelings of Uncertainty or ineffectiveness in Emotion Socialization

- When my child is angry/sad, I'm not quite sure what they want me to do
- When my child gets angry, I think, "If only he or she could just learn to roll with the punches."
- When my child gets angry with me, I think, "I don't want to hear this"
- When my child gets angry, I think, "Why can't he or she accept things as they are."

1 Always False 5 Always True \*Reverse Scored

## DISCUSSION

- No demographic characteristics were notably related associated with the variables
- Caregiver's childhood invalidation and abuse did not predict parental reflective functioning or parental responsiveness
- Parental reflective functioning was significantly related to feelings of uncertainty or ineffectiveness in emotion socialization. As parental reflective functioning increased, so did caregivers reported certainty and effectiveness in emotion socialization
- However, the mediational model proposed was not supported.
- It has been suggested that a wider array of childhood experiences predict how emotions will be utilized
- Future studies must identify mechanisms related to RF and emotion socialization, as well as build caregiver's ability to develop and explore their children's emotional disclosures