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Mothers' Emotional Flooding, Emotion Regulation, and
Parenting Style as Predictors of Children's Emotion Regulation: A Mediation Model

Netta Nahum

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ABSTRACT

There is scarce research on the relationship between Parental Emotional Flooding and child development. According to Gottman (1993), Emotional Flooding occurs when an individual experiences another's negative emotional cues as unexpected, unprovoked, intense, overwhelming, and disorganizing. Parental Emotional Flooding related to emotional flooding in the parent-child relationship. In the literature, there is evidence of Parental Emotional Flooding being positively linked with misbehaviors and with behavioral internalization and externalization (Mence et al., 2014; Lorber, Slep, & Malik, 2016). That is to say, Parental Emotional Flooding is linked with developmental deficiencies of emotional-social abilities in children.

The relationship between Parental Emotional Flooding and emotional regulation of children has yet to be empirically researched (Del Vecchio, et.al, 2016). Since emotional regulation is a significant factor in the development of social, emotional and academic abilities among children (Blair & Razza, 2007; Rimm-Kaufman, Curby, Grimm, Nathanson, & Brock, 2009; Cole, Zahn-Waxler, Fox, Usher & Welsh, 1996), there is immense importance in further research of the said relationship.

The purpose of the current study was to examine the relationship between Parental Emotional Flooding and emotional regulation among children, as well as to research the mechanisms at the base of this relationship.

Parental Emotional Flooding holds the potential for the depletion of available cognitive resources, and can diminish a parent's ability to self-regulate, leading to a diminished ability to regulate emotions (Baumeister et al., 2007; Muraven, Tice & Baumeister, 1998). Such diminished ability may result in non-adaptive choices of strategies for the long run (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996; Krosnick, 1991), such as suppressive regulation.

Suppressive regulation is a strategy rooted in the Self-Determination Theory (SDT), a theory that deals with human motivational processes (Ryan & Deci, 2000). According to the SDT, suppressive regulation refers to attempts to control and suppress emotions and their expressions, or even avoid the emotional experience in its entirety. In the long run, suppressive regulation is a non-adaptive strategy, since it leads to a sense of coercion, illegitimacy to experience negative emotions and cognitive and behavioral inflexibility (Ryan, Deci, Grolnick, La Guardia, 2006).

Ironically, it is the experience caused by the emotional suppression strategy itself that may lead to the amplification of negative emotions and non-adaptive parental behaviors such as punishments and difficulty to emotionally bond with the child (Roth, Assor, Niemiec, Ryan, & Deci, 2009). Such behaviors are typical of an authoritarian parenting style, according to Baumrind's model (Baumrind, 1971), and of a disapproving parenting style, according to Gottman, Katz and, Hooven's emotional coaching philosophy (Gottman, 1991; Gottman, Katz, & Hooven, 1996). In the literature, these parenting styles were found to be connected to deficiencies in development and emotional regulation, especially in children (Galambos, Barker, & Almeida, 2003; Gottman & DeClaire, 1997; Lagacé-Séguin & Coplan, 2005; Morris, Cui, & Steinberg, 2013; Wood, McLeod, Sigman, Hwang, & Chu, 2003). In light of this literature, the current study examined the simple relationship between Parental Emotional Flooding, adoption of a suppressive regulation strategy by the parent, non-adaptive

parenting styles, and the child's emotional regulation. Moreover, adoption of a suppressive regulation strategy by the parent as well as the use of non-adaptive parenting styles were examined as mediators of the relationship between Parental Emotional Flooding and the child's emotional regulation.

The primary hypotheses of the current study are as follows:

1. A Negative correlation between Parental Emotional Flooding and emotional regulation of the child.
2. A Positive correlation between Parental Emotional Flooding and adoption of a suppressive regulation strategy by the parent.
3. Positive correlations between the adoption of a suppressive regulation strategy by the parent and authoritarian parenting and disapproving parenting styles.
4. Negative correlations between authoritarian parenting and disapproving parenting styles and the child's emotional regulation.
5. A Negative correlation between adoption of a suppressive regulation strategy by the parent and the child's emotional regulation.
6. Positive correlations between Parental Emotional Flooding and authoritarian and disapproving parenting styles.
7. The correlation between Parental Emotional Flooding and the child's emotional regulation will be mediated by two factors: (1) adoption of a suppressive regulation strategy by the parent; (2) parenting style (authoritarian and disapproving).

The participants in this study were 90 mothers, ages 22-54 ($M=36.15$, $SD=5.98$), of children, ages 2-5 ($M=3.3$, $SD=0.93$), 51 males and 39 females. Participants were reached via social media and kinder gardens. They were asked to fill out a battery of questionnaires containing 312 segments.

For the purposes of this study, the following questionnaires were used: Emotional Flooding Scale (Slep & Heyman, 1998); Suppressive Emotion Regulation Scale (Roth et al., 2009); Parenting Styles and Dimensions Questionnaire Short Version (Robinson et al., 2001); Emotion-Related Parenting Practices Scale (Hakim-Larson et al., 2006) and Emotional Regulation Check-list (Shields & Cicchetti, 1997).

In order to test the hypotheses of the study, we first conducted Pearson correlations between the different variables. The results indicated a significant negative correlation between Parental Emotional Flooding and the child's emotional regulation, according to our original hypothesis. Furthermore, significant positive correlations were found between Parental Emotional Flooding, adoption of a suppressive regulation strategy by the parent, and authoritarian and disapproving parenting styles. A significant negative correlation was found between an authoritarian parenting style and the child's

emotional regulation. Moreover, Parental Emotional Flooding and authoritarian and disapproving parenting styles were found to be significantly correlated. However, no significant correlation was found between the adoption of a suppressive regulation strategy by the parent and the child's emotional regulation.

Next, in order to test the mediation models of suppressive regulation strategy by the parent and parenting styles in the relationship between Parental Emotional Flooding and the child's emotional regulation, we analyzed the data using the PROCESS macro add-on. The first model examined the adoption of a suppressive regulation strategy by the parent and authoritarian parenting style as mediators. The second model examined the adoption of a suppressive regulation strategy by the parent and disapproving parenting style as mediators. Both models were found to be significant.

In light of these results, a few important conclusions arise. The correlation between Parental Emotional Flooding and the child's emotional regulation can be explained by two variables: (1) adoption of a suppressive regulation strategy by the parent; (2) non-adaptive parenting style. Therefore, it is possible that emotional flooding depletes the parent's cognitive resources, which in turn leads to an adoption of a suppressive regulation strategy, that is only effective in the short run. Moreover, the adoption of a suppressive regulation strategy by the parent may amplify negative emotions in parent-child interactions, thus causing the parent to punish and criticize the child, as well as to avoid anything that might instigate negative emotions. That is to say, the parent will exhibit the use of a more authoritarian or disapproving parenting style. The use of such parenting styles can, in the long run, diminish the child's emotional regulation abilities.

It should be recognized that there are a few limitations to the current study. The sample of the study was composed of just mothers and their subjective views. Furthermore, this study is correlative and no causal interpretation can be obtained from it. Future research may include longitudinal data, reports from different characters in the child's life, and a methodology that can support a causal interpretation. Despite the above-mentioned limitations, the current study sheds new light on the subject and adds to the body of literature in the field