

# BOYS CAN CRY:

## THE INFLUENCE OF PERCEIVED PARENTING STYLE ON ROLE CONGRUITY AND EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

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### INTRODUCTION

**Emotion Regulation Theory (ERT)** denotes two kinds of parenting styles: Emotion Coaching (EC) and Emotion Dismissing (ED) (Cupach & Olson, 2006).

Emotion Coaching	Emotion Dismissing
Show awareness of a variety of emotions	Use unspecific, undetailed language for emotion
View use of negative emotions as a chance for intimacy and learning	Unable to recognize lower intensity emotions
Help child understand emotions	Display negative reaction to child's emotional display
Empathize with child's emotions	Display no empathy
Help child cope with their emotions	Do not help child cope with emotions

**Role Congruity Theory** is a theory of gender prejudice (Santiago-Mendez & Campbell, 2013; Motro & Ellis, 2017).

- Role Congruity Theory argues that individuals are rewarded when they perform gender roles that society deems to be "appropriate."
- Men typically avoid communication that may make them appear weak, and tend to embrace dominant/assertive communication patterns (Wood, 1995).
- Men are limited in the emotions that they are able to express (e.g., anger).

**Emotional Intelligence (EI)** is the ability of an individual to recognize emotions in themselves and others, verbally and nonverbally express a wide variety of emotions, regulate emotional expression, and display emotions in a variety of ways (Schutte et al., 1997).

- Williams et al. (2009) notes that data are skewed regarding the existence of a gender difference on trait EI; their study found no significant difference.

Considering all this, the current study predicts:

**H1:** Males will report lower levels of EC parenting than females.

**H2:** Parenting style will mediate role congruity insomuch that (a) ED parenting will lead to higher role congruity for males and (b) lower role congruity for females, and that (c) EC parenting will lead to lower role congruity for males and (d) higher role congruity for females.

Additionally, this study seeks to answer the following research question:

**R1:** Does perceived parenting style have a relationship with participants' self-reported EI?

### METHOD

#### PARTICIPANTS

Participants in this study included 45 undergraduate students enrolled at a small Midwestern university.

- Participant age ranged from 18 to 25 ( $M_{age} = 20.00$ ,  $SD = 1.53$ )
- 11 participants were male and 34 participants were female
- 31% were first-year students, 42% were second-year students, 18% were juniors, and 9% were seniors

#### MEASURES

**Maternal Emotional Styles Questionnaire (MESQ)** (Lagacé-Séguin & Coplan, 2005): 14 Likert-type questions measured on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Seven items measured perception of parental use of emotion coaching style (EC;  $\alpha = .81$ ) and 7 measured perception of parental use of emotion dismissing style (ED;  $\alpha = .77$ ).

**Gender Role Attitudes Scale (GRAS)** (García-Cueto et al., 2015): 20 Likert-type questions measured on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Seven items measure egalitarian gender role attitudes ( $\alpha = .67$ ) and 13 items measured sexist gender role attitudes ( $\alpha = .93$ ).

**Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS)** (Schutte et al., 1998): 33 Likert-type questions measured on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Scale items were summed ( $\alpha = .92$ ).

### RESULTS

**H1:** Males will report lower levels of EC parenting than females.

An independent samples t-test was performed to compare men's perceptions of EC parenting with women's perceptions of EC parenting. Results indicated that there was not a significant difference between men's and women's perceptions of parental use of emotion coaching when growing up,  $t(43) = -1.14$ ,  $p > .05$ . Men's perceptions of parental use of EC ( $M = 2.99$ ,  $SD = .94$ ) were not significantly lower than women's ( $M = 3.29$ ,  $SD = .70$ ).

Thus, **hypothesis 1 was not supported**.

**H2:** Parenting style will mediate role congruity insomuch that (a) ED parenting will lead to higher role congruity for males and (b) lower role congruity for females, and that (c) EC parenting will lead to lower role congruity for males and (d) higher role congruity for females.

A parallel multiple mediation model was analyzed using the PROCESS macro for SPSS (Hayes, 2013).

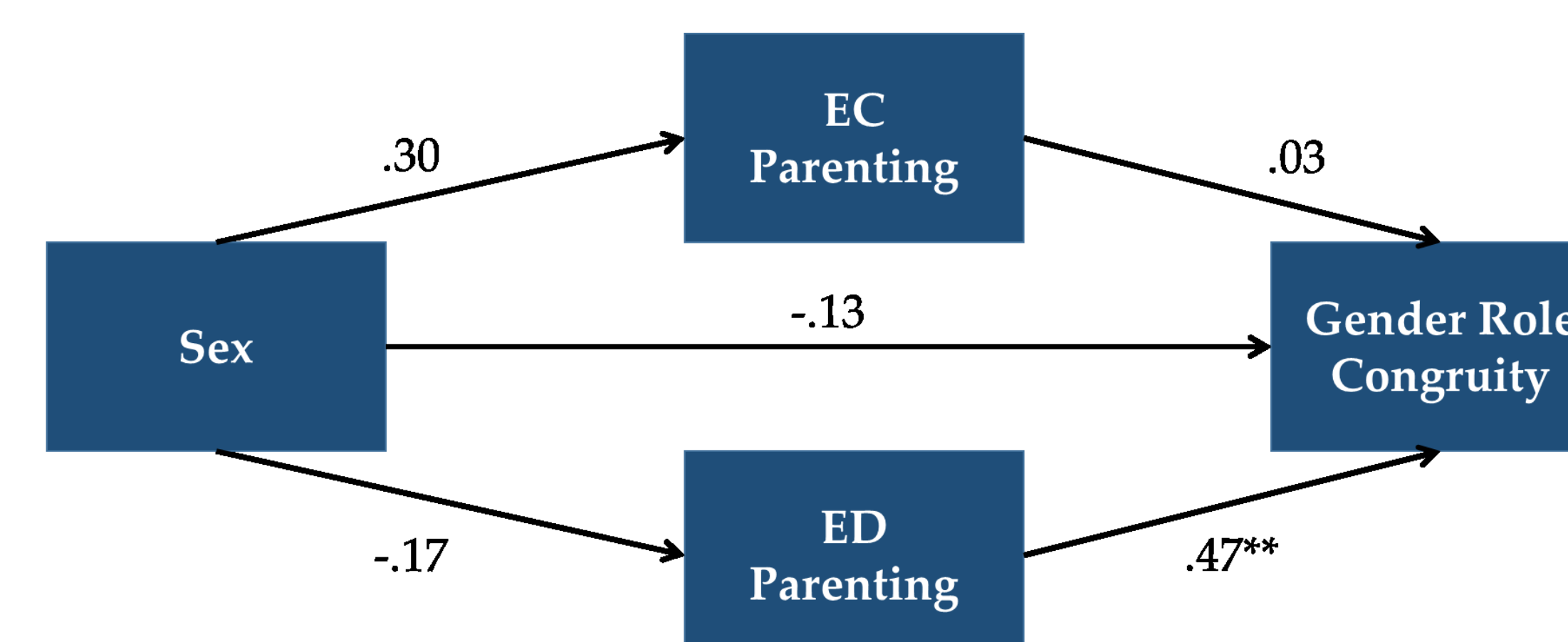


Figure 1. RQ1 Parallel Mediation Model

Notes: \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ . Figure values are unstandardized regression coefficients

Results indicate that parenting style does not mediate the relationship between sex and gender role congruity. **Thus, hypotheses 2a, 2b, 2c, and 2d were not supported.**

**R1:** Does perceived parenting style have a relationship with participants' self-reported EI?

A correlation analysis was conducted to investigate this research question. Results indicated:

Correlations between Emotional Intelligence and Parenting Style		EI	EC	ED
EI	Pearson's r	—	0.375 *	0.037
	p-value	—	0.014	0.816
EC	Pearson's r	—	—	0.409 **
	p-value	—	—	0.005
ED	Pearson's r	—	—	—
	p-value	—	—	—

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ ; EI = emotional intelligence, EC = emotion coaching parenting style, ED = emotion dismissing parenting style

These analyses indicate that young adult perceptions of parental emotion coaching and self-assessment of emotional intelligence were significantly, positively correlated,  $r(43) = .375$ ,  $p < .05$ .

However, young adult perceptions of parental emotion dismissing and self-assessment of emotional intelligence were not significantly correlated,  $r(43) = .037$ ,  $p > .05$ .

### DISCUSSION

#### EMOTION COACHING AND SEX

When looking for sex differences in participant perceptions of parental use of emotion coaching (EC), there were no significant differences between male and female participants. We had originally assumed the gender role expectations would lead parents to utilize less EC when interacting with their young sons—because men aren't expected to have the same emotional range as women.

- Allowing young adult children to assess their parents' use of EC (as they were growing up) is problematic.
- Children likely can't remember the interactions they had with their parents at young ages. So, these perceptions are likely distorted by time.

#### GENDER ROLE CONGRUITY, PARENTING, AND SEX

We hypothesized that parenting style (EC or ED) would explain the relationship between sex and gender role congruity. Our proposed model was not significant.

- The insignificant result here may have come from the utilization of the GRAS. Gendered assumptions change, so scales often need revision.
- In the future we should utilize more than one gender scale in case we find another one does conceptualize the variable as we had originally hoped.

#### PARENTING AND EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Our data did indicate a significant relationship between young adults' perceptions that their parents used EC and emotional intelligence (EI). There was no significant relationship between ED and EI.

- The in-depth emotional discussions that come with EC likely enable individuals to develop stronger EI.
- The lack of emotional discussions that come with ED would, theoretically, lessen an individual's EI.

### LIMITATIONS

Limitations of the current study are the use of a convenience sample, rather than a true random sample. Also, the sample was limited to students currently enrolled at the UWEC. Additionally, the evaluation of perceived parenting style was reliant on self-report data. Although the researchers avoided leading questions in the survey, the use of self-report data does pose a limitation to the study.

### FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research should recruit a more representative sample, from a variety of age groups and geographic locations. Additionally, future research may aim to compare and contrast the opinions/ values of parents about appropriate ways to raise a son, versus those to raise a daughter using the framework of Emotion Regulation Theory (i.e., whether or not parents may favor EC or ED parenting as being more appropriate for their daughters and sons respectively).

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