

Views of Emotion in Adulthood: The Role of Caregiver Meta-Emotional Philosophy

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between views of emotion in primary caregivers and meta-emotional philosophy (MEP) in their adult children. The way parents respond to and handle their child's emotions plays a considerable role in child development. Gottman et al. (1996, 1997) found that in order to engage with their child's emotions, parents must first acknowledge their own emotions and their philosophy regarding these emotions, also known as their meta-emotional philosophy. In order to provide a healthy view of emotion for their child, parents must have awareness of specific emotions in themselves, have awareness of emotions in their child, and being able to coach these emotions in their child.

Previous research has found a positive relationship between parental MEP and child MEP in preschool children (Gottman et al., 1996, 1997), middle childhood (Morey & Gentzler, 2017), and adolescents (Katz & Hunter, 2007). However, there are currently no published studies that view the relationship between these variables in an adult sample.

Methods

- **Participants and Procedure.** 100 participants from the university were recruited to participate in the online study. The majority were female ($n = 71$) and identified as Caucasian ($n = 59$). Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 45 years.
- **Emotions: Help vs. Hindrance View Survey.** Scale included items from the Attention to Feelings Factor of the TMMS (Salovey et al., 1995) and items from the Meta-Interest factor of the MES (Mitmansgruber et al., 2009).
- **Meta-Emotion Scale Survey.** Included items from Anger, Compassion, Tough Control, Suppression, Interest, and Contempt/Shame factors, which all assess people's thoughts and feelings about their emotions
- **Open-Ended Questions.** Participants responded to 2 open-ended questions: "What do you believe emotions are for?" and "Do you think your primary caregiver has influenced your view of emotion? If so, how?"

Hypotheses

We hypothesized that primary caregivers (PC) who were reported to be more accepting of their emotions would be reported to endorse a help view of emotion, therefore less of a hinder view of emotion.

Based on literature, we also hypothesized that there would be a direct relationship between views of emotion in PCs and MEP in their adult children. Specifically, a reported help view of emotion in PCs would be positively correlated with positive meta-emotion their adult-children. On the other hand, a reported hinder view of emotion in PCs would be positively correlated with negative meta-emotion in their adult children.

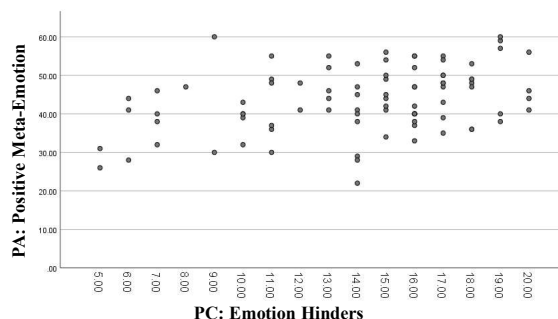


Figure 1. Scatterplot illustrates the positive correlation between an emotion hinder view in primary caregivers and positive meta-emotion in their adult child.

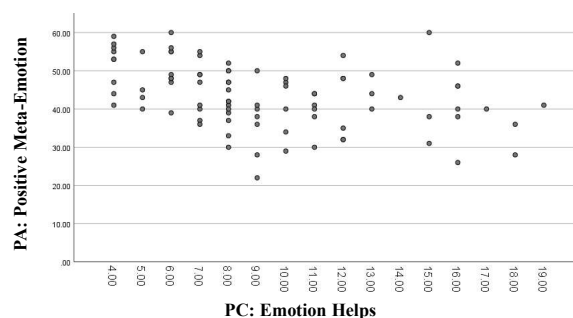


Figure 2. Scatterplot illustrates the negative correlation between an emotion helps view in primary caregivers and positive meta-emotion in their adult child.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

	M (SD)
PC: Emotion Helps	9.33 (3.88)
PC: Emotion Hinders	14.10 (3.91)
PA: Positive Meta-Emotion	43.58 (8.37)
PA: Negative Meta-Emotion	58.61 (15.21)

Table 1. Mean scale scores for primary caregivers (PC) and adult children (PA)

Results

- A hindering view of emotion in primary caregivers (PC) was positively correlated with positive meta-emotion in participants (PA) ($r = .37, p < .01$) and negatively correlated with negative meta-emotion in participants ($r = -.28, p < .01$).
- A help view of emotion in primary caregivers was negatively correlated with positive meta-emotion in participants ($r = -.39, p < .01$).
- The more primary caregivers endorsed a more help view of emotion, the less they endorsed a hindering view of emotion ($r = -.61, p < .01$).

Discussion

Our results did not support hypotheses or past findings. It is possible this occurred due to various factors such as emotional overcompensation, acquired skills in adulthood due to life experiences, and the lack of baselines for MEP. It is also possible the results were obtained simply because an adult sample was utilized.

This study revealed an inverted relationship between MEP in primary caregivers and their adult-children. Although not supported by literature, results provide an opportunity to extend our knowledge about the effects of parental MEP in adult children. However, more research should be done to better understand these interactions.

References

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Notes

Please send questions and comments to bavelar@uccs.edu.
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