

Abstract

Children's emotion regulation strategies are created in concert with caregivers, who teach children how to think, express, and respond to emotion. Caregivers' representations about acceptance, expression, and regulation of emotion may guide efforts to promote different approaches to emotion regulation in their child. This study examines relations between caregivers' representations of their own emotions, parents' responses to emotional exchanges with their children, and children's approaches to emotion regulation. Findings support the contribution of parental emotion representations to parents' behavior during emotional exchanges, and lend support to the contribution of these representations and behaviors to children's emotion regulatory development.

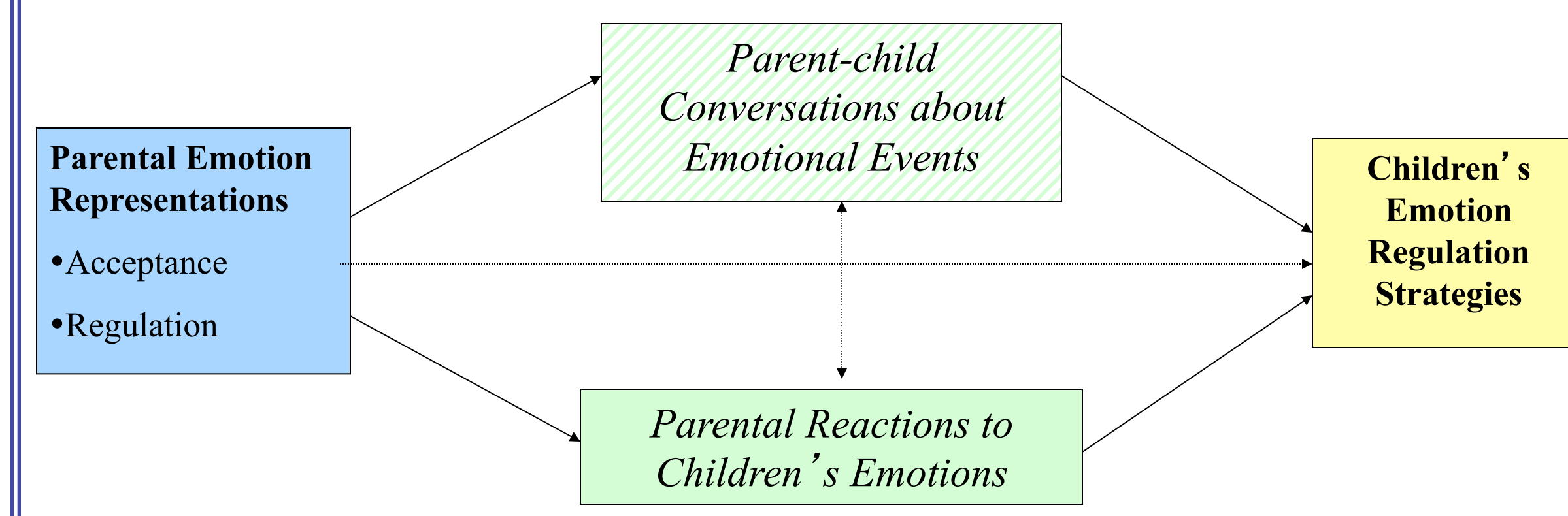
Introduction

- Emotion regulation is a core component of adaptive social functioning throughout development. How and when we regulate our emotions leads to important social consequences early in life.
- A developmental approach to emotion regulatory development emphasizes the co-construction of emotion regulation; beginning from birth and continuing throughout life, our emotions are soothed and enhanced by our social partners (Thompson, 1994).
- However, little research has examined how caregivers' own emotional lives influences the co-construction of their child's regulatory development.
- The degree to which a parent accepts and values emotions constructs an environment that may facilitate open discussion and exploration of negative emotions. It is also logical that parents' emotion regulation style may serve as a model of regulatory functioning, and extend to provide evaluative feedback to children about their own regulation approaches.
- This study examines how caregivers' acceptance and value of emotions in their lives and approach to regulating and alleviating negative affect may influence children's regulatory development.
- Specifically, we explore how emotion representations underlie parental reactions to children's negative emotions and guide discourse style about emotions in conversations with their children, as well as how these representations relate to children's emotion regulation strategies.

Research Questions

- Research Question 1:** What are the specific ways in which parent emotion representations influence parents' behaviors during emotional exchanges and children's emotion regulation strategies?
- Research Question 2:** Are there direct links between parent emotion representations and children's emotion regulation? Or, are these links mediated by the qualities and characteristics of parent socialization processes?

Figure 1. Conceptual Model



Method

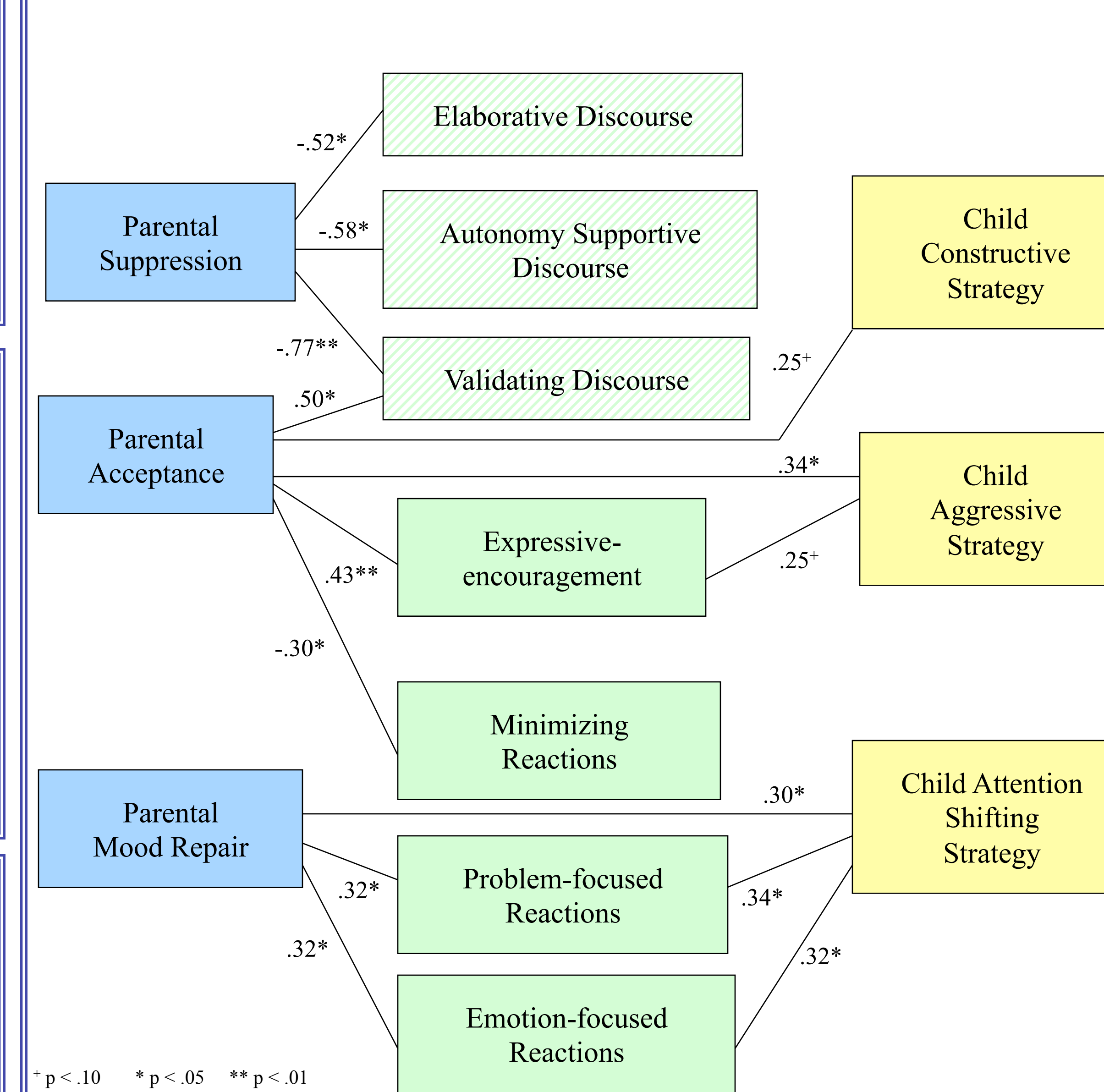
Participants. Forty-seven children (*M* age = 4.09 yrs, 40% female) and their mothers were recruited from community child care centers and preschools.

Procedures. During two laboratory visits, parents completed questionnaires measuring representations of emotions and their behavior during emotion exchanges, and engaged their children in conversations about recent emotional events. Conversational data are currently analyzed for a subset of the sample (N=17).

Table 1. Measures

Variable	Measure
Parental Emotion Representations	<i>Trait Meta-Mood Scale (Salovey et al., 1995) & Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (Gross & John, 2003)</i>
Acceptance	"Feelings give direction to life."
Mood Repair	"I try to think good thoughts no matter how badly I feel."
Suppression	"When I am feeling negative emotions, I make sure not to express them."
Parental Behaviors	<i>Coping with Children's Negative Emotions Scale (Fabes et al., 1990)</i>
Expressive-encouragement	Gives encouragement to express negative affect or validates child's negative emotions
Emotion-focused	Responds with strategies designed to help the child feel better
Problem-focused	Helps the child solve the problem that caused the distress
Minimizing	Decreases the seriousness of the situation or devalue the child's reaction or problem.
Parental Discourse	<i>Emotion Conversation</i>
Elaboration	Global score (1-5) of the amount of detail provided by the parent.
Autonomy-support	Global score (1-5) of the degree the parent is supportive of the child's perspective and contributions to the conversation
Validation	Global score (1-5) reflecting the parent's acceptance of the child's perspective and empathy for the child's feelings.
Children's Emotion Regulation Strategies	<i>Children's Emotion Regulation Processes Questionnaire (adapted from Eisenberg et al., 1993)</i>
Constructive	E.g., Information-seeking, seeking adult support
Aggressive	E.g., Physical or verbal aggression to release emotion
Attention shift	E.g., Distraction, changes goal

Figure 2. Bivariate Relations between Parental Emotion Representations, Parental Behavior and Children's Emotion Regulation Strategies



Results

Research Question 1 (Figure 2):

- Parents' acceptance of their emotions was positively related to:
 - parents' expressive encouragement of children's negative affect, validation during emotional discourse, and children's use of aggressive emotion regulation strategies.
- Parents' efforts to repair their negative mood was positively related to children's use of attention shifting strategies.
- Parents' suppression emotion regulation style was negatively related to autonomy supportive, elaborative, and validating discourse.

Research Question 2:

- Direct effects (Figure 3). Only parental acceptance predicted children's aggression when parental acceptance and expressive encouragement were included in a regression model.
- Mediating effects (Figure 4).
 - In separate analyses, emotion-focused reactions and problem-focused reactions remained marginally significant when included with parental mood repair to predict child attention shifting. In each case, the bivariate relationship between parental mood repair and children's attention shifting was no longer significant.

Discussion

Research Question 1:

There are specific patterns between parents' representation of emotions and their behavior during emotional exchanges with their children. Parents who placed more importance on their own emotional experiences reacted to their children's negative affect in supportive ways and validated their children's emotional experience during conversations. Parents who put forth greater efforts to resolve their own negative moods focused on alleviating their children's negative affect by comfort and problem-solving. In contrast, parents who believed emotions and emotional displays should be suppressed spoke to their children in ways that devalued the emotional experience and their children's perspective. **These patterns suggest that some parental emotion representations have greater significance for conversation style, while others influence parental reactions to negative emotions.**

Research Question 2:

Findings suggest that parental emotion representations influence children's emotion regulation through their association with parental behaviors and, possibly, parent-child discourse. Parental mood repair influenced children's emotion regulation through its association with emotion-focused and problem-focused reactions to children's negative emotions. Discourse variables will be examined with a full sample to further elucidate potential mediating effects.

These results highlight the importance of examining parent-child emotional exchanges as forums for the co-construction of regulatory development, and the need to understand how parental beliefs about emotion influence different kinds of socialization behaviors.

Figure 3. Direct Effect Model for Children's Aggression
 $R^2 = .13, F(2,44) = 3.26, p < .05$

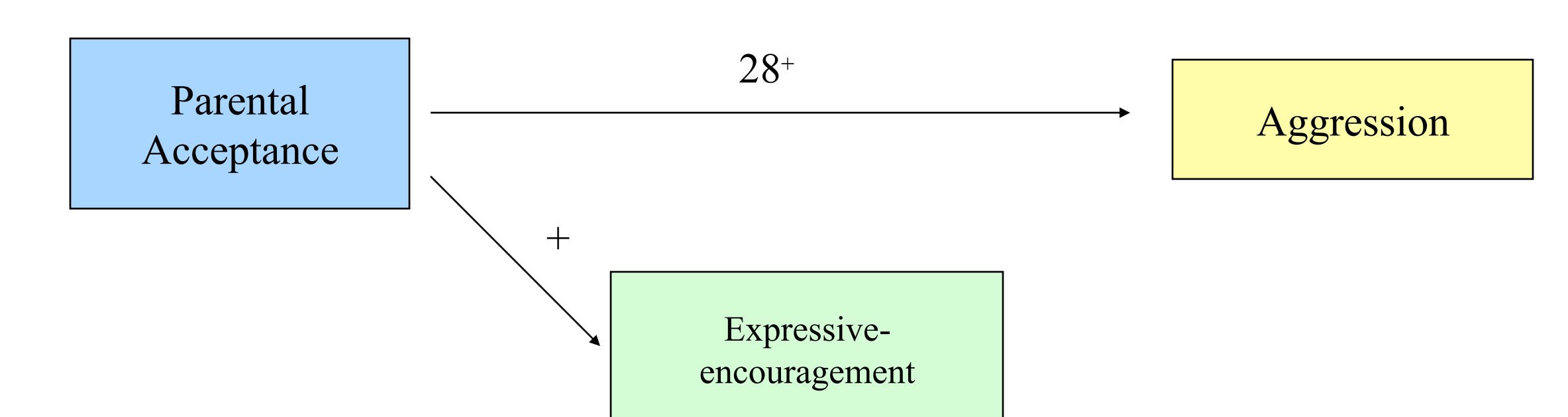


Figure 4. Mediation Model for Children's Attention Shifting

