



# Representations of Emotion in Adolescents and their use of Emotion Regulation Strategy

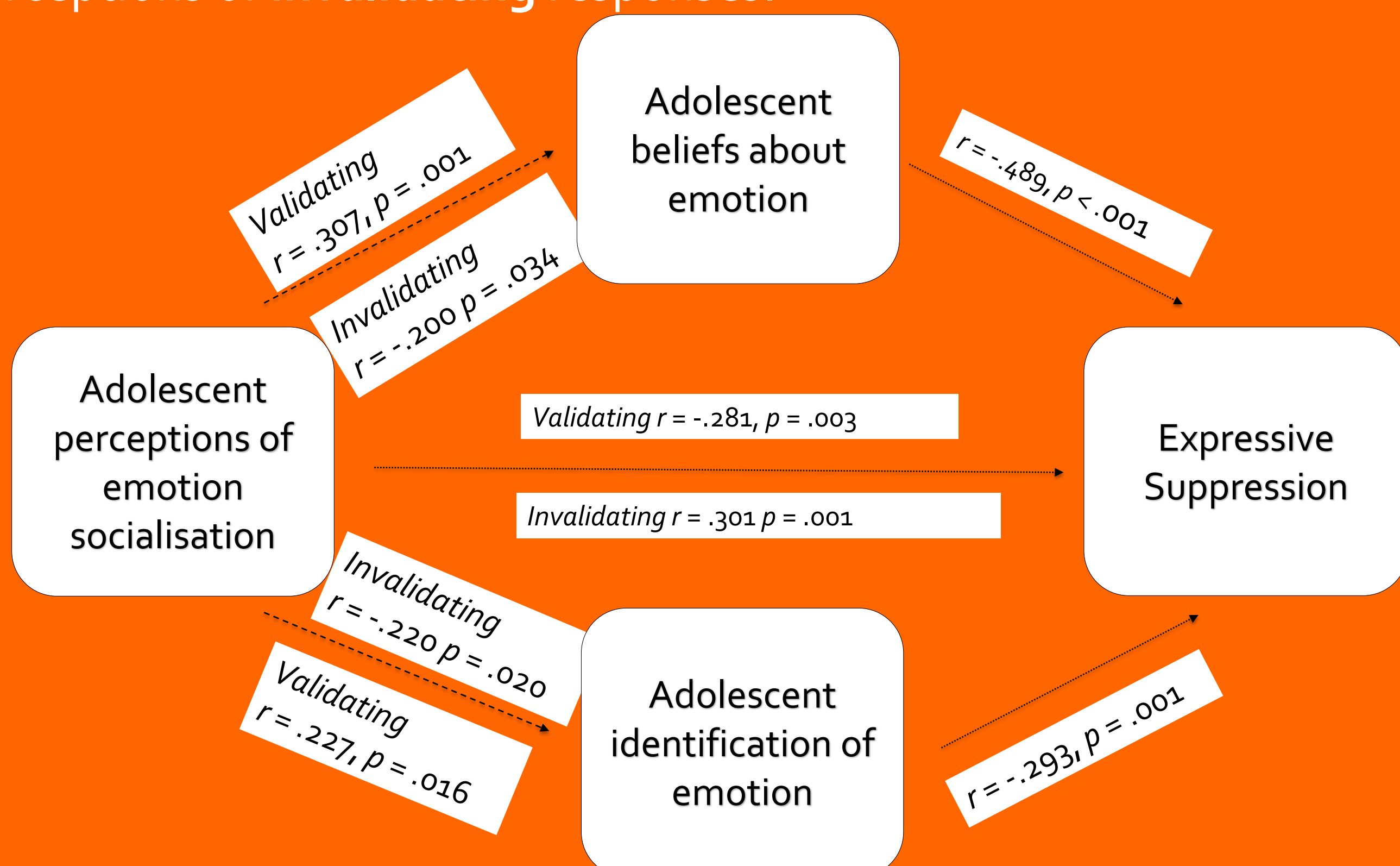
**Background:** Emotion regulation (ER) is an established factor in well-being and psychopathology across the life span. The way children learn to regulate emotion is associated, in part, with the way parents act as agents of emotion socialisation. In other words how parents model, teach and respond to displays of emotion. Theory suggests that children internalise an understanding about emotion, based on this socialisation, which in turn drives how they regulate it. In particular the use of a regulation strategy where expressions of emotion are suppressed is related to poorer outcomes. There is little evidence examining this relationship in adolescents, and less that examines whether internalised beliefs and understanding (representations of emotion) mediate this relationship.

## Glossary of terms

- **Emotion Regulation (ER):** to how an individual monitors and modifies their emotional responses to stimuli.
  - **Cognitive Reappraisal:** An ER strategy involves re-interpreting emotional stimuli to reduce the negative emotional impact.
  - **Expressive Suppression:** is the inhibition of expressive emotional behaviour, for example keeping a “poker-face”
- **Emotion socialisation:** the direct and indirect ways information about emotion and its management is passed on. Can be validating or invalidating of emotion.
- **Representations of Emotion:** The way an individual understands emotion. The beliefs they have about emotion and their awareness of different emotions.

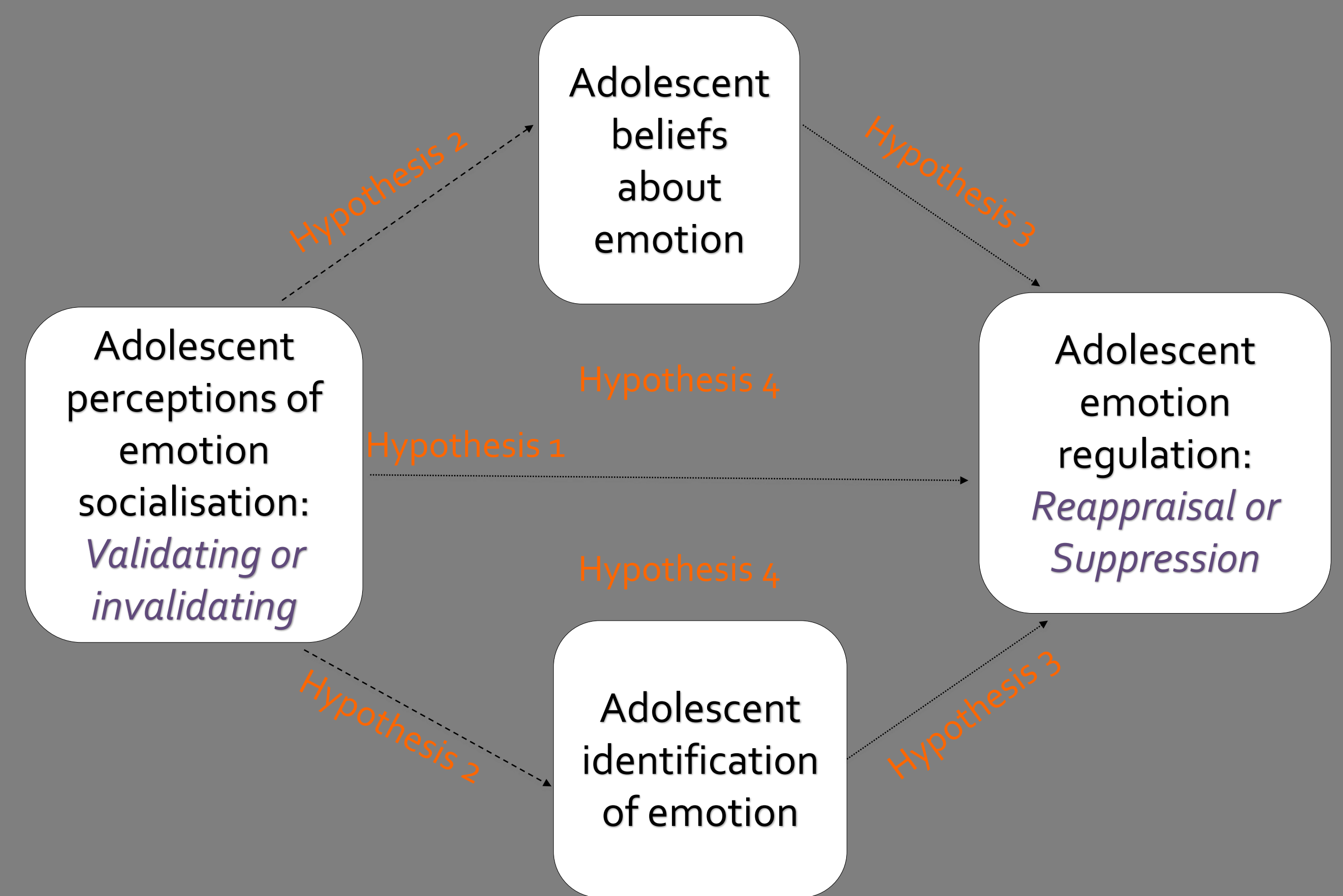
## Results

- Adolescents reported more use of cognitive reappraisal than expressive suppression and tended to perceive their mother’s responses to their expression of negative emotion as validating. Females rated their mothers as more validating and less invalidating than males did.
- Adolescent perceptions of their mother’s emotion socialisation was associated with their use of emotion: greater validation was associated with greater use of Cognitive Reappraisal and less use of Expressive Suppression as ER strategies.
- When adolescents experienced their mothers as validating negative emotions, adolescents valued emotion more and were better able to distinguish between their emotions.
- The ability to distinguish between emotions and believing that emotions are valuable predicted the use of the ER strategy expressive suppression but not cognitive reappraisal.
- The ability to distinguish between emotions and believing that emotions are valuable mediated the relationship between perceived socialisation and the use of the ER strategy expressive suppression but not cognitive reappraisal.
- Increased use of Cognitive Reappraisal was correlated with perceptions of emotion socialisation and representations of emotion but the relationships were not strong enough to be predictive (with perceptions of validation being the exception).
- Perceptions of emotionally **validating** responses were better predictors of ER strategy & emotion representations than were perceptions of **invalidating** responses.



## Aims

1. To establish a relationship between perceived maternal emotion socialisation and emotion regulation in adolescents.
2. To examine the relationship between perceived maternal emotion socialisation and adolescent representations of emotion.
3. To assess whether beliefs about emotion predict adolescent emotion regulation strategy
4. Assess whether beliefs about emotion mediate the relationship between perceived socialisation and emotion regulation.



## Method:

123, 12-18 year olds from four schools completed online self-report questionnaires on their representations of emotion (beliefs and awareness) and emotion regulation (cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression).

For emotion socialisation adolescents reported on whether their mothers responded to their displays of negative emotion in emotionally validating or invalidating ways.

## Theoretical Implications:

- Cognitions about the value of emotion influence the use of emotion regulation strategy in adolescents.
- The finding of the mediatory role of representations of emotion between perceived socialization and emotion regulation strategy supports the theory that offspring internalise maternal socialisation practices.
- Cognitive Reappraisal needs to be explored as a concept that may be distinct from aspects of emotional socialisation.

## Applied & Clinical Implications:

- Adolescent beliefs that emotions are not valuable and their reduced ability to distinguish between emotions, are associated with an increased use of Expressive Suppression, which in the long term could lead to poorer psycho-social outcomes.
- There is a role for targeting beliefs about the value of emotion to limit the over reliance on the ER strategy Expressive Suppression.
- The current sample was a community school sample, therefore schools are well placed to encourage an ethos of valuing and labelling emotions.
- Helping mothers validate negative emotion could contribute to reduced use of Expressive Suppression.