MATERNAL DISSOCIATION, META-EMOTION, AND CHILD EMOTION REGULATION:
A STUDY OF RESIDENTS IN A FAMILY HOMELESS SHELTER FOR VICTIMS OF
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

by

Brian S. Mueller, M.A.
City University of New York

ABSTRACT

Adviser: Professor Margaret Rosario

The present study examined the relationships between maternal dissociation, mothers’
self-described parenting behaviors in child emotion regulation, and the emotion regulatory
capacity of their children. These relationships were investigated in a sample of predominately
low-income African-American and Latino mothers and children residing in a domestic violence
shelter. In this study, I investigated a mediational model relating maternal dissociation, mother’s
acceptance of child emotions, and child difficulties in emotion regulation and behavior. I
predicted that mothers who reported more dissociative experiences would demonstrate less
awareness and acceptance of emotions when they responded to children’s sadness, fear,
happiness, and anger. I also predicted that the children of those mothers with more dissociation
would be experiencing more difficulties with emotion regulation and behavior problems.
Finally, I predicted that mothers who demonstrated more emotional acceptance would have
children with fewer emotional and behavioral problems, and that emotional acceptance would
mediate the relationship between maternal dissociation and child emotional and behavioral
problems.
The study provided support for two of the three relationships present in the model, but not for the mediational model as a whole. Mothers who reported more dissociation demonstrated less acceptance of their children’s emotions. Mothers with more dissociation also reported more intervention when their children were upset or disruptive, an indicator of child emotion regulation difficulties. However, no relationship was found between maternal emotional acceptance and child emotion regulation. The relationships identified between study variables added to the small but growing literature on dissociation and parenting. The finding suggests that, through direct and indirect effects on child emotion regulation, maternal dissociation may be implicated in the intergenerational transmission of the effects of trauma.