

## Steinberg Knew it: Authoritative Parenting Does Affect Teen Externalizing Problems. But How Does it Work?

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### This Poster in a Nutshell

This study explored teens' and parents' feelings, goals, and behaviors in response to each other, in a large longitudinal sample of Swedish families.

- If teens engaged in normbreaking behavior or consumed alcohol/drugs, parents subsequently reported strong negative feelings.
- But still, teens did not notice changes in parenting in response to their problem behaviors.
- Parental control did not prevent externalizing behaviors.
- Parental warmth prevented teens' alcohol/drug use,
- because teens who felt loved tended to submit under parental authority and did not keep secrets from parents.

**Conclusions:** Yes, authoritative parenting works, but in a different way than suggested by Steinberg (2001) and others. Firm behavior rules do not prevent teen externalizing, but the display of affection makes teens willing to stay in a close relationship and to follow their parents.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Steinberg: "We know some things"

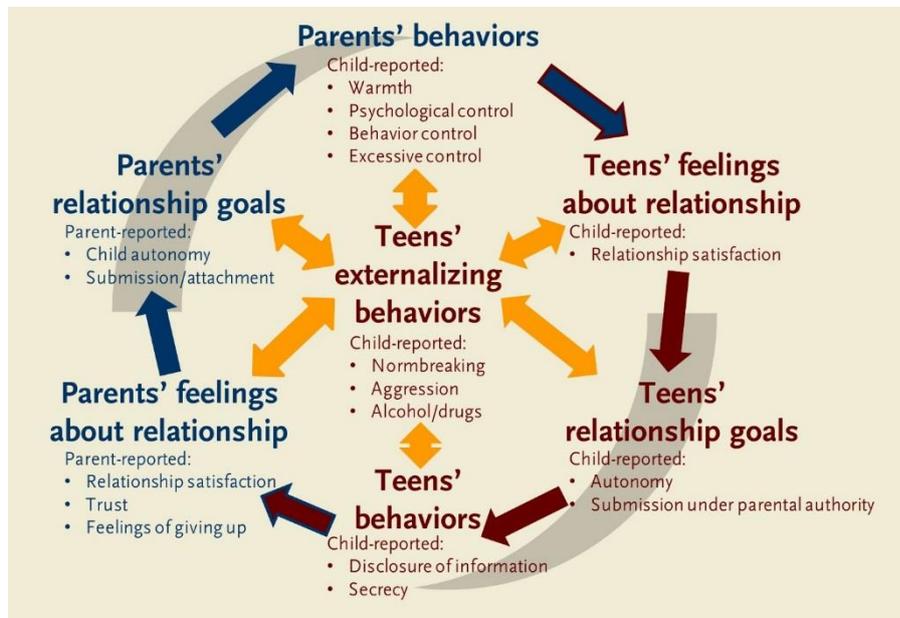
- Authoritative parenting prevents teen problem behaviors.
- Authoritative parenting includes warmth (involvement), psychological autonomy granting, and behavior control (firm/consistent guidelines and expectations).
- Control most important for preventing externalizing behaviors.

### 1.2 Do We Really Know?

- Lots of cross-sectional evidence, but...
- measure of control, "monitoring," actually a measure of relationship quality,
- longitudinal evidence much less impressive,
- low parental control might be consequence rather than cause of externalizing behavior, e.g., as a result of giving up.
- Even if control prevents externalizing behavior, we need to know why parents do not control their kids.

### 1.3 A New Model (see Fig. 1)

- From a systems/transactional perspective, both parents and teens supposed to react to each other's behaviors, by feelings, goals to preserve or to change the relationship, and own behaviors in order to achieve these goals.
- Each of these behaviors, feelings, and goals might be associated with externalizing behaviors.



**Figure 1.** Transactional model of teens' and parents' reactions to each other, each possibly linked to teens' externalizing behaviors.

## 2. This study...

- 1) tests the bright arrows in Figure 1, that is, bidirectional effects between teens' externalizing behaviors and each of the behaviors, feelings, and goals in the parent-teen relationship;
- 2) if significant, tries to explain these effects by other variables on this circle, e.g., if teens engage in problem behaviors due to parental behaviors, can this be explained by teens' feelings, goals, or behaviors towards their parents?

## 3. Methods

### 3.1 Sample

- Longitudinal study with 2 annual waves, 2013 and 2014
- Community sample, gathered at public schools in a mid-sized Southern Swedish municipality, grades 7–10 at T<sub>1</sub> (ages 13–16)
- High participation rate, but some attrition due to absence at either time of data collections, not matching personal ID #, and change of schools between grades 9 & 10.
- *N* at Time 1: 1,281, at Time 2: 1,274, overlap: 824.
- At Time 2, also parent data, but only *n* = 290 responded, of which 195 matched with teens at Time 1.

### 3.2 Measures

- Data collections at school, parent data collected via mailed survey.
- Mixture of published scales, e.g., externalizing behaviors, largest parts of parenting and teens' behaviors, and newly developed scales assessing feelings and goals.

### 3.3 Analyses

1. Cross-lagged panel analyses, i.e. dependent variable at T2 predicted by independent variable at T1, controlling for dependent variable at T1, gender, and school grade.
  - Exception: as parent data at T1 were lacking, no analyses of effects by parent feelings and goals; and analyses predicting parent feelings and goals not controlled for T1 feelings and goals.
2. Mediation analyses in 2 ways: (a) by T1 mediating variable, controlled for gender and grade; (b) by T2 mediating variable, controlled for T1 mediating variable, gender, and grade.
- Multiple imputation, in order to avoid bias and to make full use of collected data.
  - If many data are missing (i.e., parents' feelings + goals), larger effects needed for significance.

## 4. Effects on Externalizing?

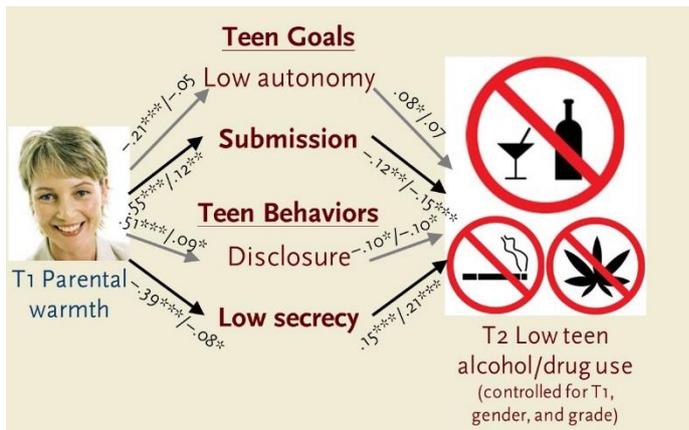
### 4.1 Normbreaking and Aggression Were NOT Affected

- Only 1 of 18 tested effects significant: High levels of excessive parental control predicted low levels of normbreaking ( $\beta = -.10^*$ ).
  - As cross-sectional associations were positive (high excessive control/high normbreaking) and as the longitudinal effect was zero without use of Multiple Imputation, this rather seems to be a suppressor effect/artifact/alpha error.
- Most cross-sectional associations were significant, but among parents' reports, only feelings of giving up were related to teen normbreaking.

### 4.2 Alcohol/Drug Use Affected by Parental Warmth, and Teen Goals and Behaviors

- Warmth  $\rightarrow$  low alcohol/drug use:  $\beta = -.07^*$
- Autonomy goals  $\rightarrow$  high alcohol/drug use:  $\beta = .09^*$
- Submission goals  $\rightarrow$  low alcohol/drug use:  $\beta = -.12^{***}$
- Disclosure  $\rightarrow$  low alcohol/drug use:  $\beta = -.11^{**}$
- Secrecy  $\rightarrow$  high alcohol/drug use:  $\beta = .16^{***}$
- Even more cross-sectional associations were significant, this time even parent-reported trust with teens' low alcohol/drug use.

### 4.3 Explanation of Parental Warmth Effect



**Figure 2.** Effect of parental warmth on low teen alcohol/drug use was explained by teen goals and behaviors.

First coefficient: mediator at T1, controlled for gender and grade. Second coefficient: mediator at T2, controlled for T1, gender, and grade. Grey arrows: Sobel z of indirect effect significant ( $p < .05$ ) only if using T1 mediator.

## 5. Effects of Externalizing?

### 5.1 Aggression Did NOT Affect any Other Variable

### 5.2 Normbreaking and Alcohol/Drug Use Did Predict Parental Feelings, but NOT Parental Behaviors

Predictor	Relationship Satisfaction	Trust	Feelings of Giving up
Normbreaking	$-.45^{***}$	$-.50^{**}$	$.47^*$
Alcohol/drug use	$-.18^*$	$-.28^*$	$.32^*$

- The large coefficients are due to the lack of control for T1 dependent variables.

### 5.3 Alcohol/Drug Use Affected Teen Goals and Behaviors in Paradoxical Ways

- Alcohol/drug use increased goal to submit under parental authority:  $\beta = .10^*$
- Alcohol/drug use increased behavior to disclose information to parents:  $\beta = .09^{**}$
- Despite the fact that alcohol/drug use at both times was related to low levels of these goals and behaviors.
- Explanation partly due to reduced stability of goals and behaviors among alcohol/drug users and regression to the mean, but most part of this effect appears substantial. Maybe, teens who consume alcohol or smoke with their parents' permission feel that they get along well with them.

## 6. Take-Home Message

- Steinberg (2001) was apparently wrong in suggesting preventive effects of firm authority.
- He was right in the importance of authoritative parenting, however, warmth seems to be the crucial parenting behavior.
- Warmth makes teens submit to parental authority and seek parents' closeness, by not withholding information.
- Externalizing behaviors predicted negative feelings in parents and affected teens' own attitudes to their parents.