

Explanation of Normative Declines in Parents' Knowledge about their Adolescent Children

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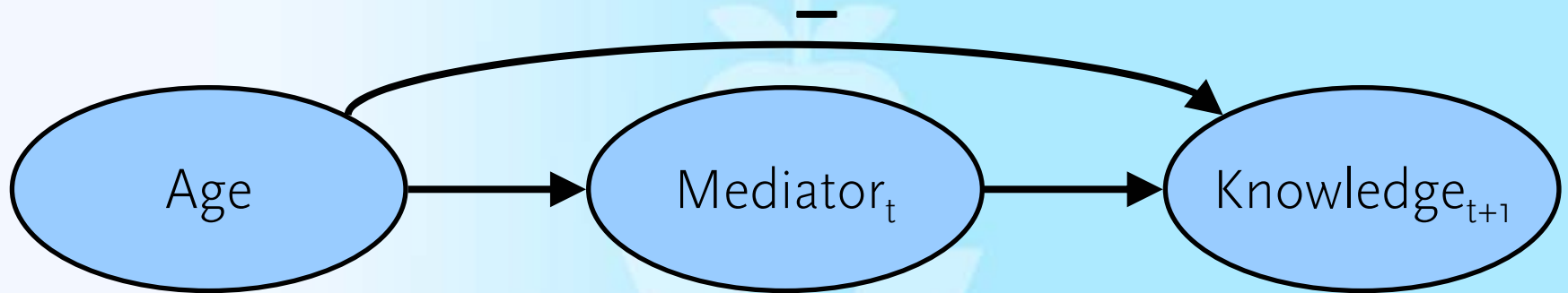
Background

- Parental knowledge: “Do your parents know about what you do in your spare time?” Knowledge about child’s whereabouts, school, and spending allowances
- In the past, parental knowledge used as measure for “monitoring”: Correlations with low levels of problem behavior seen as result of parenting style
- But knowledge stems to the largest part from adolescent disclosure and not from parental control (Stattin & Kerr, 2000)
- This literature misses the developmental aspect: Parental knowledge declines as a norm (Masche, 1998, 2006)
- Why declines knowledge on average, although high levels of knowledge are related to positive development?

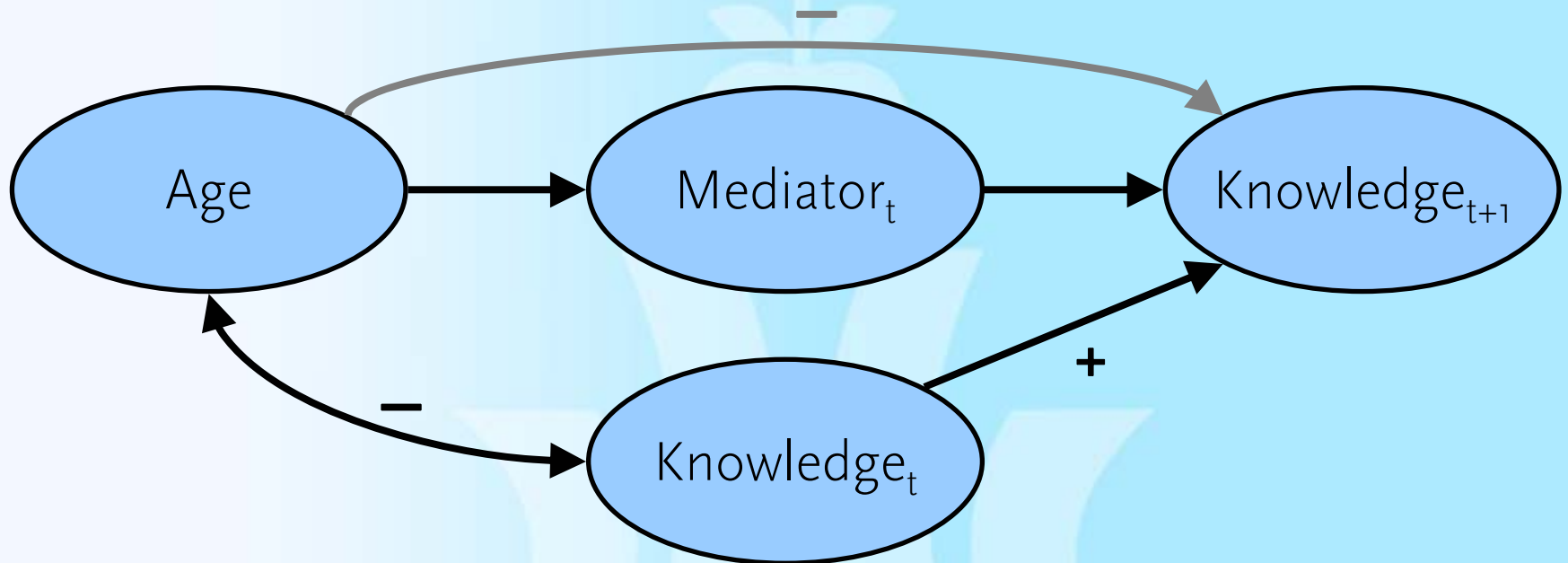
Parental knowledge might decline because...

- Adolescents try to become autonomous
 - Own territories (Youniss & Smollar, 1985): areas that parents do not any longer know about
 - Own decisions
- Parents might adapt to adolescents' autonomy needs (Hofer, 2003)
 - Reduced control
- Adolescents establish new relations outside the family, which might detract them from close family relations

Logic of analyses



Logic of analyses



Sample

Cohort	1991		Age	13	14	
	1990		13	14	15	
	1989		13	14	15	16
	1988	13	14	15	16	17
	1987	14	15	16	17	18
	1986	15	16	17	18	
	1985	16	17	18		
	1984	17	18			
		2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
		Year of survey				

$N = 2,415$
 1,222 boys, 1,193 girls
 4,875 questionnaires,
 with further questionnaire
 even at $t + 1$

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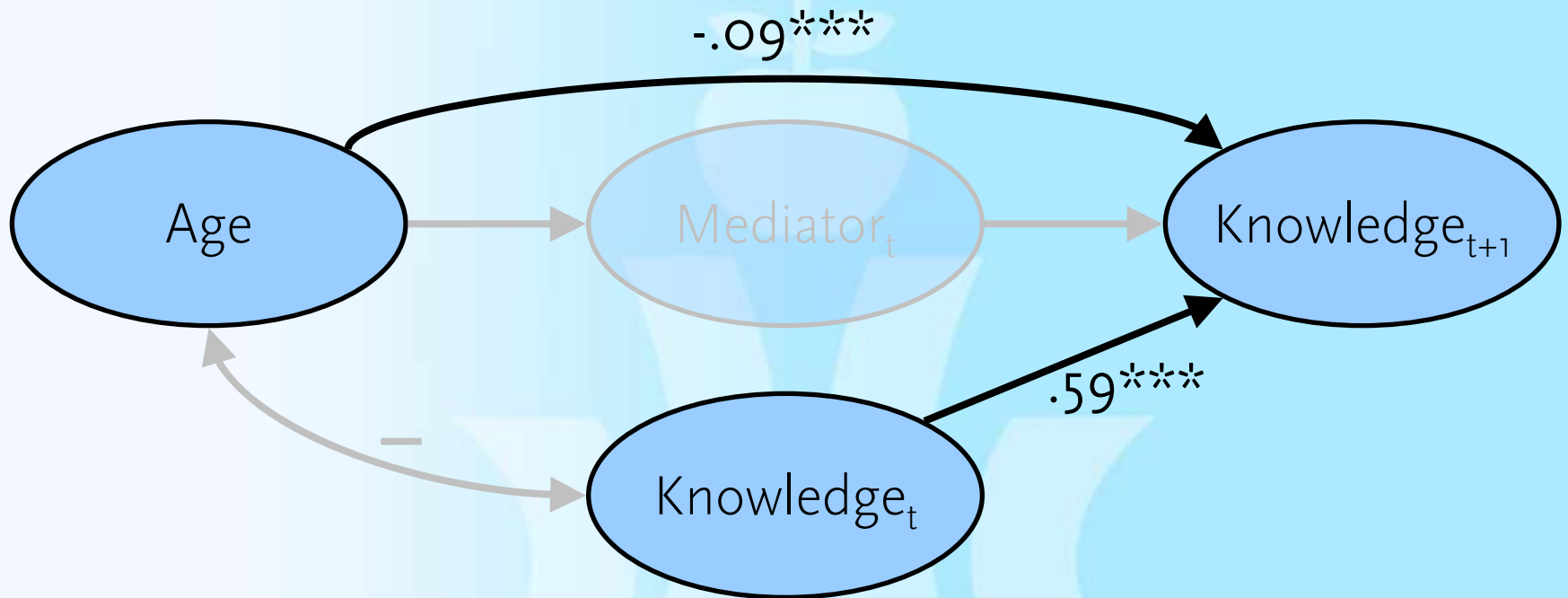
$N = 1,223$ parents

1,442 questionnaires,
with further adolescent
questionnaire even at $t + 1$

Multi-level analyses

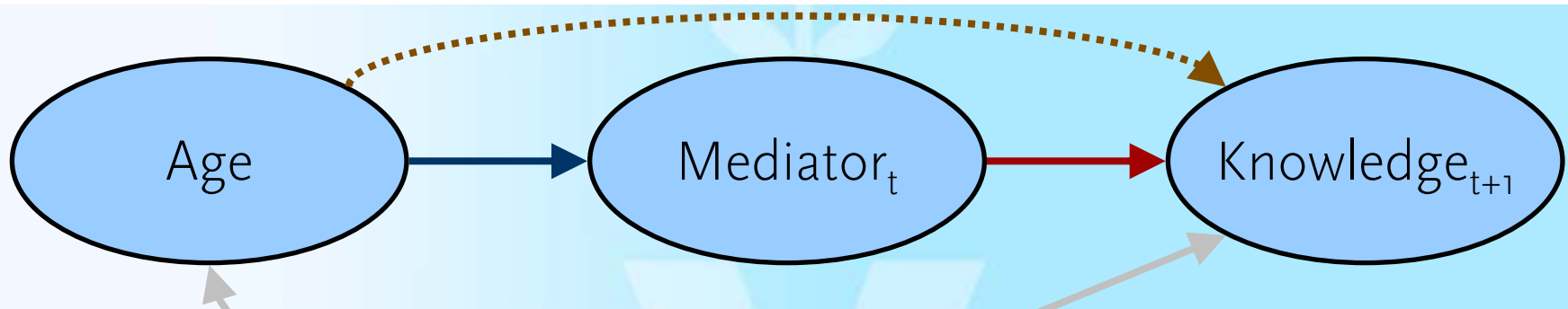
- Level 1: within individual
Mediation analysis as shown before
- Level 2: between individuals
Effects of cohort and gender on intercepts and regression weights
- This implies...
 - Main effects of cohort and gender are controlled
 - Interactions of cohort and gender with study variables are tested
 - Test of mediation effects at varying numbers of occasions per individual

Age decline of parental knowledge



Even controlling time 1 knowledge, each year, knowledge declines by 1/10 *SD*

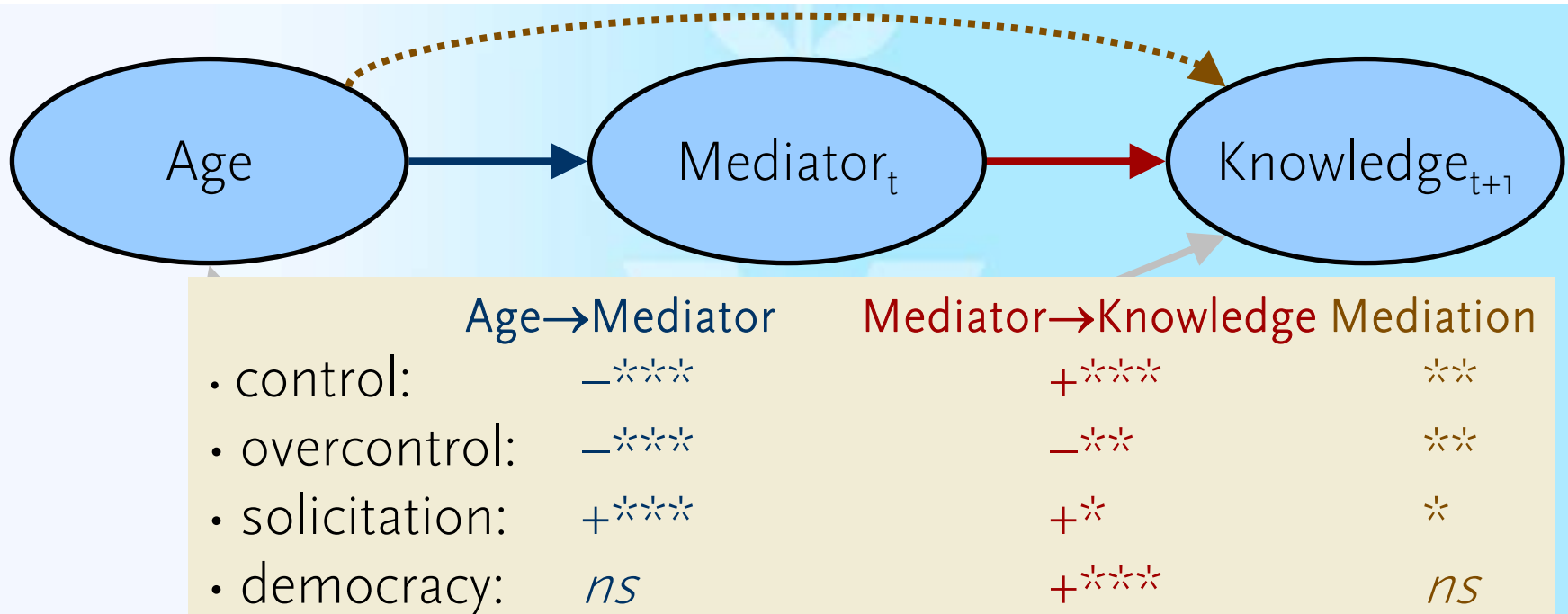
Test of mediation: I. Private territories



	Age→Mediator	Mediator→Knowledge	Mediation
• disclosure:	-***	+***	***
• secrecy:	<i>ns</i>	-***	<i>ns</i>
• defiance:	+***	-***	***

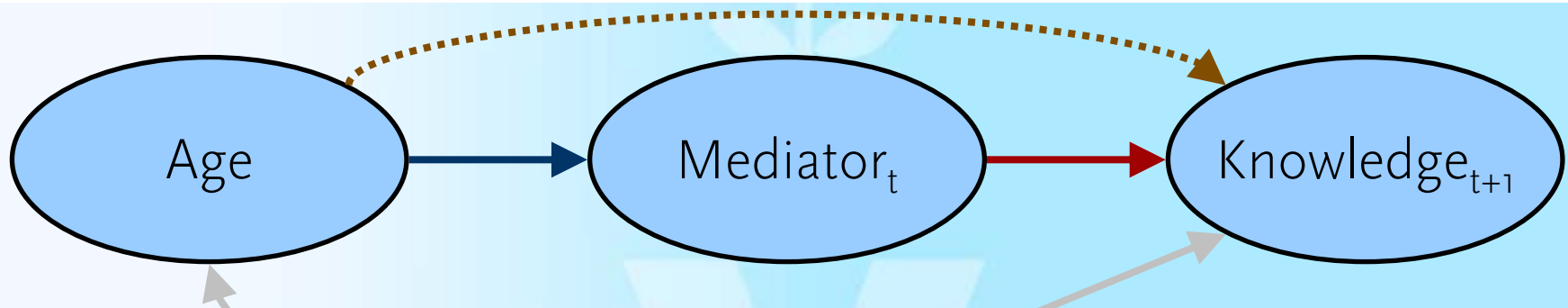
Adolescents' information management and claims of increased autonomy, but not secrecy, explain normative decline of parental knowledge.

Test of mediation: II. Parental monitoring, etc.



Ambiguous effect: Decreasing control reduces knowledge, but bothering adolescents less with overcontrol and asking them more slows down the decline in knowledge.

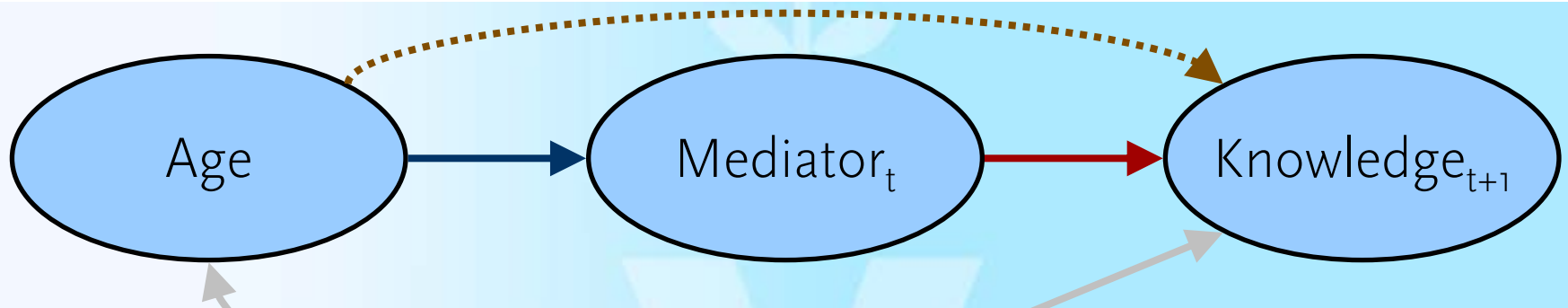
Test of mediation: III. Relations outside family



	Age→Mediator	Mediator→Knowledge	Mediation
• peers:	+***	+*	*
• romantic:	+**	<i>ns</i>	<i>ns</i>

Although adolescents enhance their relations outside the family, this rather contributes to parental knowledge, thus, slows down the age-decline.

Test of mediation: IV. Parent-reported mediators



	Age→Mediator	Mediator→Knowledge	Mediation
• disclosure:	<i>ns</i>	+***	<i>ns</i>
• trust:	<i>ns</i>	<i>ns</i>	<i>ns</i>
• worries:	<i>ns</i>	<i>ns</i>	<i>ns</i>
• avoidance of confrontation:	<i>ns</i>	-*	<i>ns</i>
• giving up:	<i>ns</i>	<i>ns</i>	<i>ns</i>

Why do parent-reports not explain knowledge decline?

- In subsample with parent data, no significant age decline in knowledge ($-.02$ *ns*)
 - restricted sub-group
 - restricted age-range
- Parents do not perceive changed relationship
 - same reasons as above
 - smaller sample-size, most parents assessed only once
 - largely “pathologic” scales

Unique and combined mediation effects

- Three mediators explained age decline of parental knowledge: Adolescent disclosure & defiance, parent control
- But they might overlap and might actually not be independent.
- When entering all of them in the regression equation, do they still predict parental knowledge?
 - Disclosure: .17***
 - Defiance: -.04*
 - Control: .06 *ns*
- Combined, these variables explain 38.7% of age decline in parental knowledge.

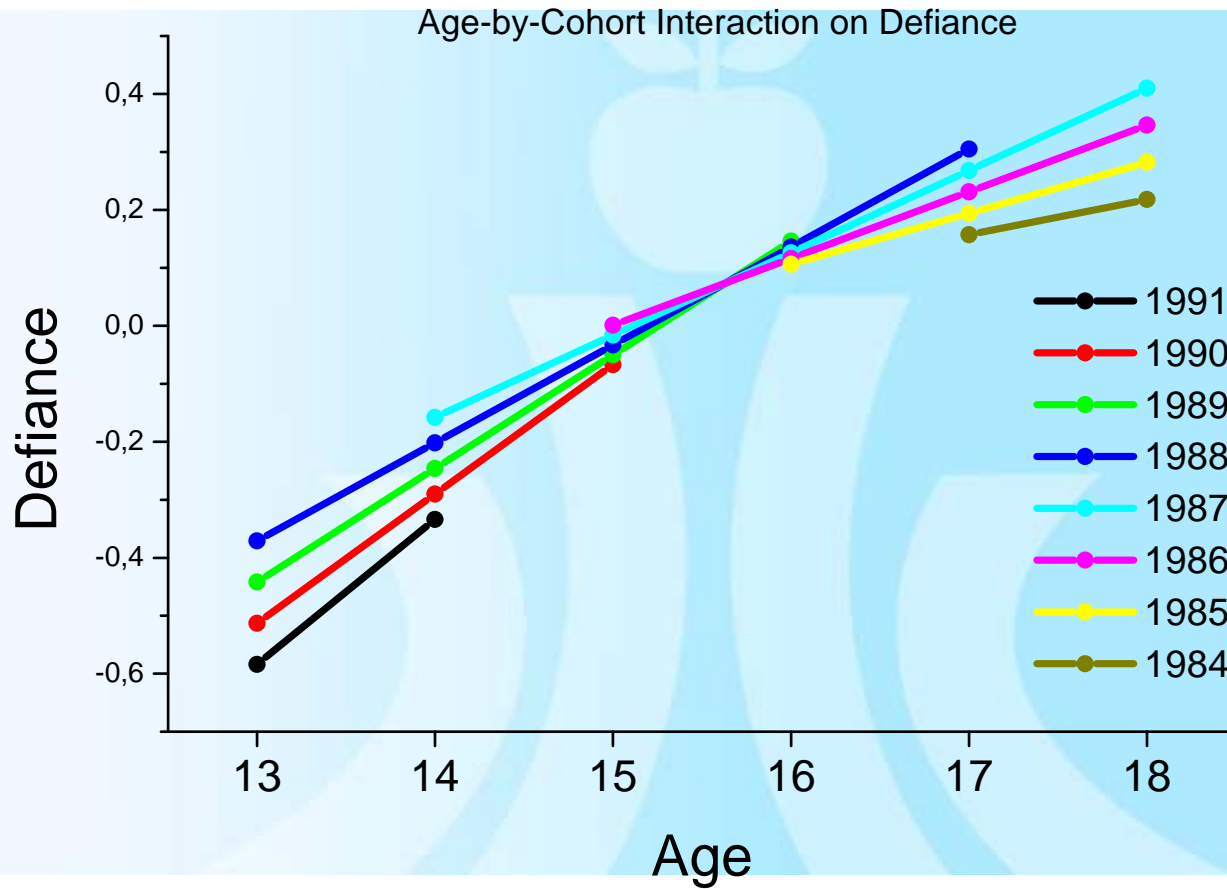
Gender

- Somewhat mixed gender main effects and age-by-gender interactions
- For 2 out of 14 potential mediator variables, differential effects at $p < .05$: Effects of disclosure and low secrecy on parental knowledge somewhat weaker in girls
- Still, all mediation effects which are significant in general, are so for each gender

Cohort

- Nothing that would affect the mediation analyses
- Some main effects, independent of age:
 - parents know less about later-born youth
 - more control & solicitation with later-born youth, less avoidance of confrontation (parent-report), better friendships
 - cohort main effects and cohort-by-age interactions which actually reflect curvilinear age trends (see next slide)

Cohort



Discussion

- Longitudinal multi-level analysis of mechanisms that lead to decreased knowledge
- Adolescents' establishment of private territories leads to reduced parental knowledge: less disclosure of information, more defiance
- Also reduced parental control explains less knowledge, but is spurious if controlling disclosure and defiance
- Families also slow down loss of parental knowledge:
 - Parents reduce overcontrol and increase solicitation: adaptation towards more lenient ways of control (Hofer, 2003)
 - More satisfied peer relations: Transferring peer experiences to parent relationships (Youniss & Smollar, 1985)?
- Core results largely gender and cohort independent

Take-home message & outlook

- Parental knowledge mirror of parent-adolescent relationships
- Adolescents drive their development towards autonomy
- Both generations also slow down this development: driving and delaying processes are balanced and maybe coordinated
- Precociously low levels of parental knowledge might indicate lack of balance & coordination and need to be distinguished from the normative development towards autonomy