

Revisiting Barber's Behavioral Control: An Action-Theoretical Interpretation of Ascribed Parental Knowledge

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We know some things – but which ones?

- Here, I shall cite Steinberg's idea that behavior control has a preventive effect against normbreaking
- But that the usual measure to test this idea is parental knowledge
- Which we all know is not the same (Kerr & Stattin, 2000; Stattin & Kerr, 2000)

Barber's version of the theory

- Barber proposes a unique effect of behavior control, after statistically controlling psychological control and parental support which might be correlated
- He continues to use parental knowledge as a measure of behavior control
 - Common use in previous research
 - “ample theoretical and empirical evidence that it functions as a regulatory, or control variable”
 - Consistent associations with low levels of normbreaking
 - Only half of the variance in knowledge is explained by child disclosure; after statistically controlling disclosure, knowledge still predicts low levels of normbreaking.

We need a picture to understand this

- A Venn diagram, taking away variance from the predictor, leaving the unique prediction of normbreaking by knowledge
- But...
 - If one takes into account the unreliability of measures, child disclosure explains even 62 – 74 % of variance of knowledge. The tiny rest still explains normbreaking, however.
 - If some portion of parental knowledge does not overlap with child disclosure, this does not prove that this portion is behavior control.
 - In the opposite, behavior control explained a smaller part of parental knowledge and its effects than child disclosure did.
 - Even if Barber was right that some small portion of parental knowledge reflects behavior control, child disclosure needs to be partialled out in order to obtain that specific portion. As this has not been done, the observed knowledge–normbreaking association reflects child disclosure rather than behavior control.
- However...
 - In Stattin & Kerr's (2000; Kerr & Stattin, 2000) critique, psychological control and parental support were not controlled. The overlap of child disclosure with the unique part of knowledge is probably smaller than in their studies, thus a larger portion remains which might be behavior control. (Make another picture to show this) In addition, behavior control might explain a larger part of this residual portion.

In conclusion

- Barber has not controlled child disclosure
 - ⇒ His findings might reflect effects of child disclosure rather than behavior control
 - ⇒ Barber might be right or might be wrong
- Stattin & Kerr have not controlled psychological control and support
 - ⇒ The unique part of knowledge might be less due to child disclosure and more due to behavior control than they have found
 - ⇒ Stattin & Kerr might be right or might be wrong
- Guess what the first aim of this study is!
 - Yes, find out who is right and who is wrong
 - But right now, we have unproven statements by Barber versus empirical findings by Stattin & Kerr which, however, were not meant to address Barber's specific version of the theory. Thus, I expect Barber to be wrong.

This study: First aim, and a rare opportunity

- Test whether association knowledge—low normbreaking can be better explained by behavior control or by relationship processes
 - Behavior control measures: control with respect to spare-time, and to school; punishments
 - I don't have child disclosure. I use caring for parents and parental warmth & openness instead.
 - ⇒ This study is mainly testing Stattin & Kerr's critique against Barber's understanding of parental knowledge, rather than testing their alternative interpretation of parental knowledge.
 - Controlling psychological control and parental support
- German sample from Barber's Cross-National Adolescent Project (C-NAP)
 - Core methods designed by Barber

Sample

- $N = 968$ students attending school in a West German city
- 87 % of population at selected schools. Selection representative for federal state.
- Age: 13 years (grade 7): $n = 544$; 16 years (grade 10): $n = 424$
- 50.3 % females
- Four different school tracks, reflecting SES
 - All variables controlled for age, school track, age-by-school track interactions, and family structure
 - Supplementary analyses showed that these controls did not moderate the effects under study.
- Students filled out questionnaires in class

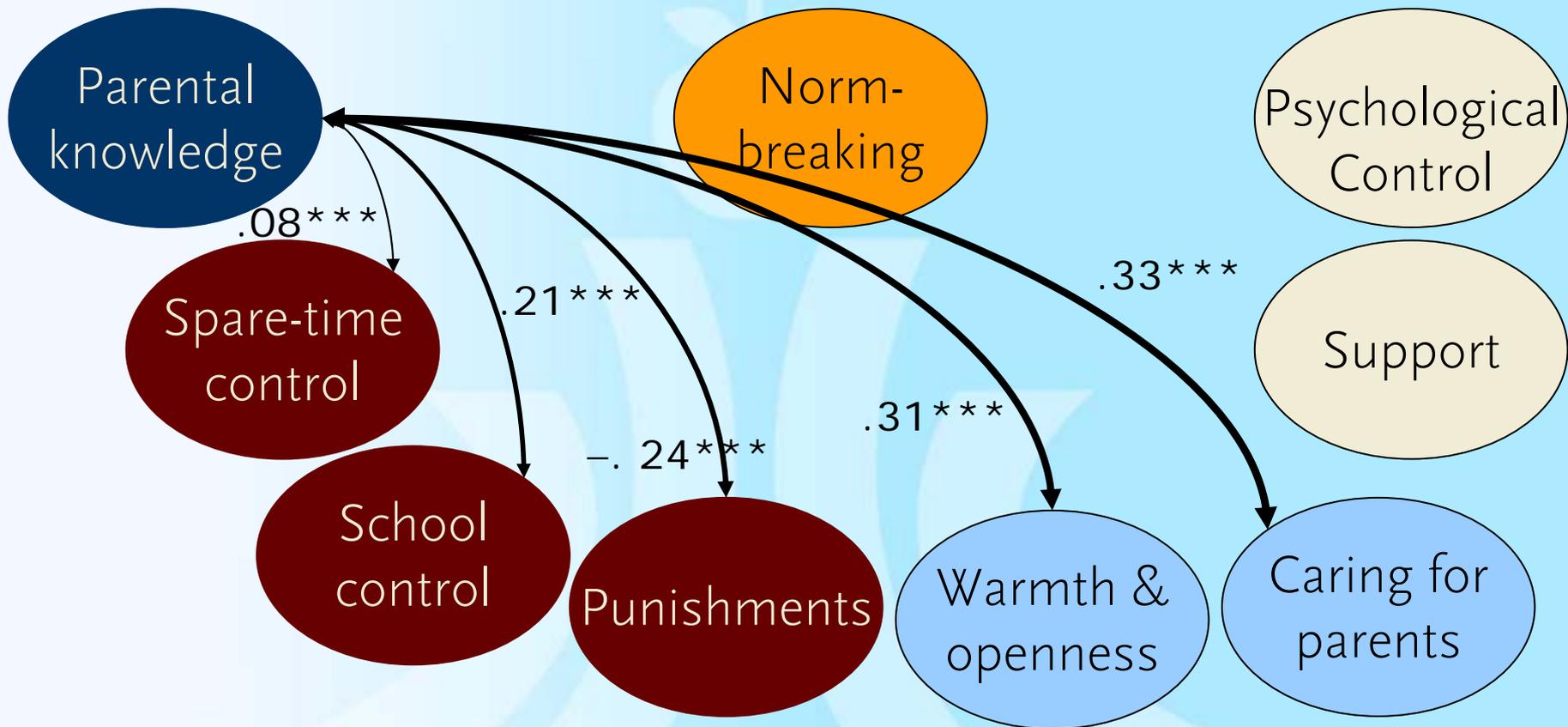
Measures

- Scales for mother/father taken as indicators of shared latent variables.
- Parental knowledge: “How much does your mother [father] REALLY know... What you do with your free time?” (5 + 5 items for each parent)
- Normbreaking: “I cut classes or skip school,” “I use alcohol or drugs for nonmedical purposes,” “I swear or use dirty language,” etc. (8 items)
- Behavior control
 - Spare-time control (latent factor with 3 indicators):
 - Laissez-faire (reversed): “My Mother or Father is a person who... lets me go out any evening I want” (3 + 3 items)
 - Curfew rules: “During the past 30 days, how often did one of your parents: Set a time you had to be home on school nights?” (2 items)
 - School control: “During the past 30 days, how often did one of your parents: Check to see whether your homework was done?” (3 items)
 - Punishments: “My Mother or Father is a person who... punishes hard, so I will remember it for a long time.” (5 + 5 items)

Measures (cont'ed)

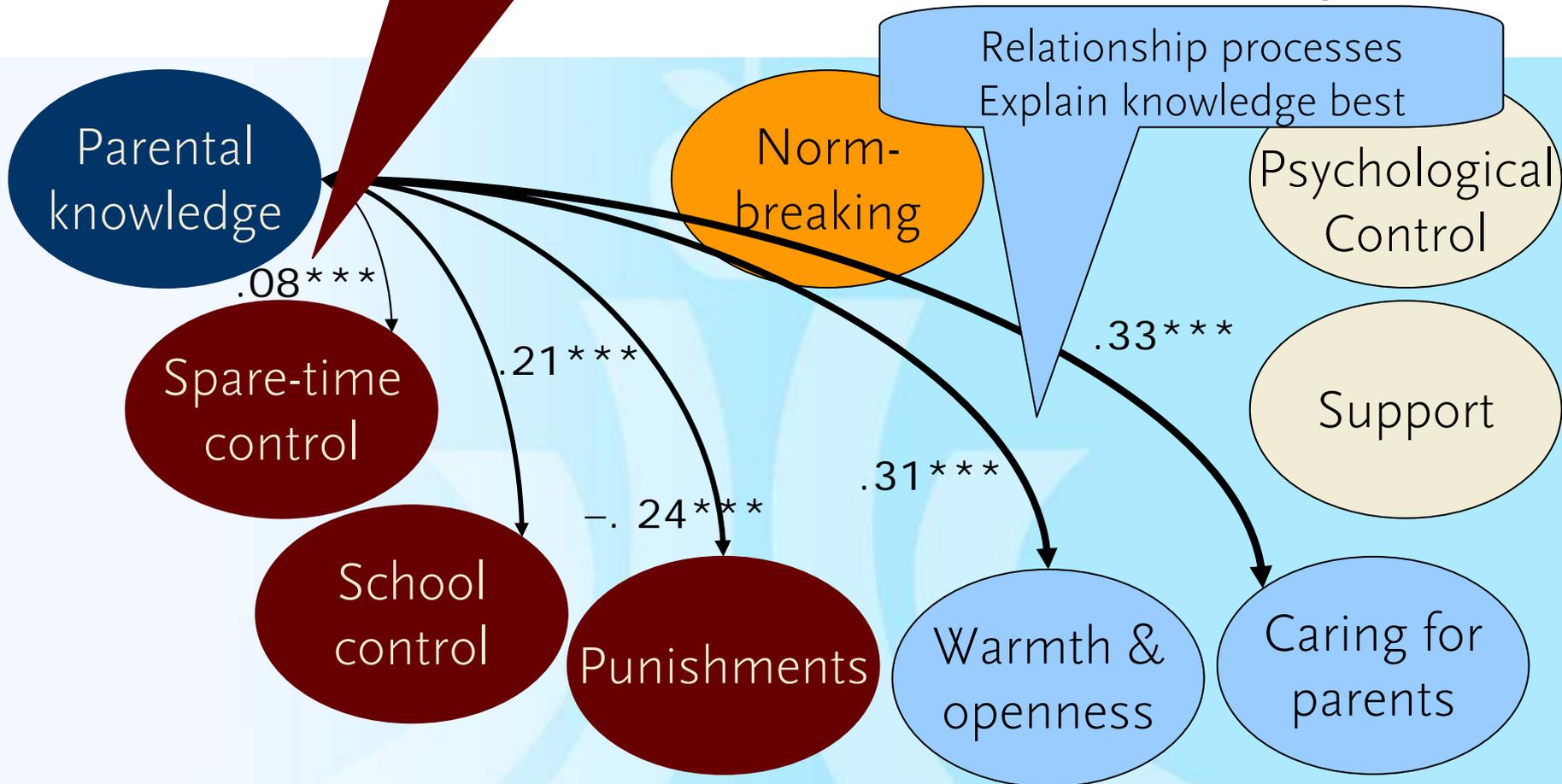
- Relationship processes
 - Warmth & openness (= psychological autonomy): “My Mother or Father is a person who... respects the way I feel and think about things” (8 + 8 items)
 - Caring for parents (newly developed scale): “How often do you do these things for your Mother and your Father? – Give encouragement in difficult situations” (5 + 5 items, $\alpha = .83/.87$)
- Control variables
 - Psychological control: “My Mother or Father is a person who... is less friendly with me, if I do not see things her/his way.” (8 + 8 items)
 - Parental support (= acceptance): “My Mother or Father is a person who... believes in showing her/his love for me.” (10 + 10 items)

Which variable explains parental knowledge?

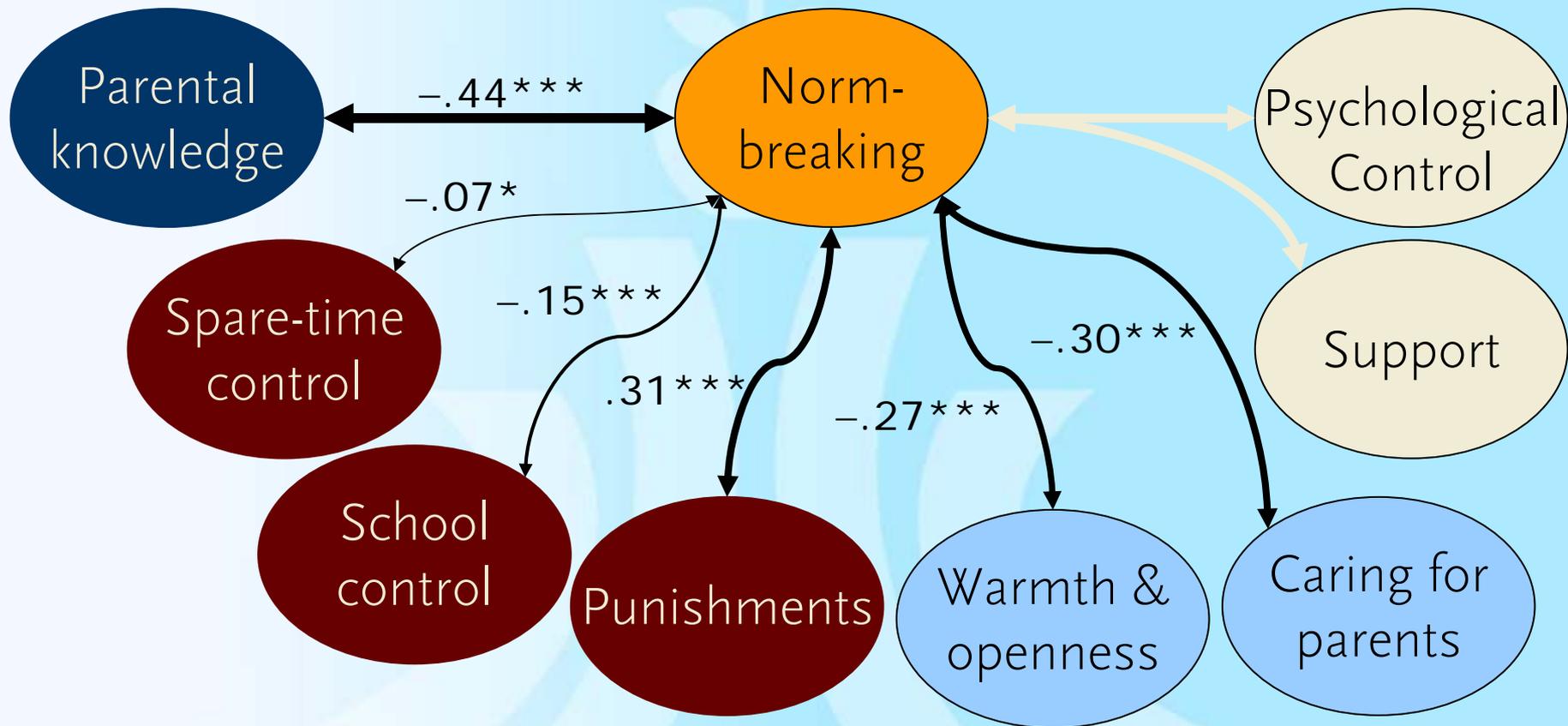


Despite high reliability, this composite is poorly associated with knowledge.

Which variables explain parental knowledge?

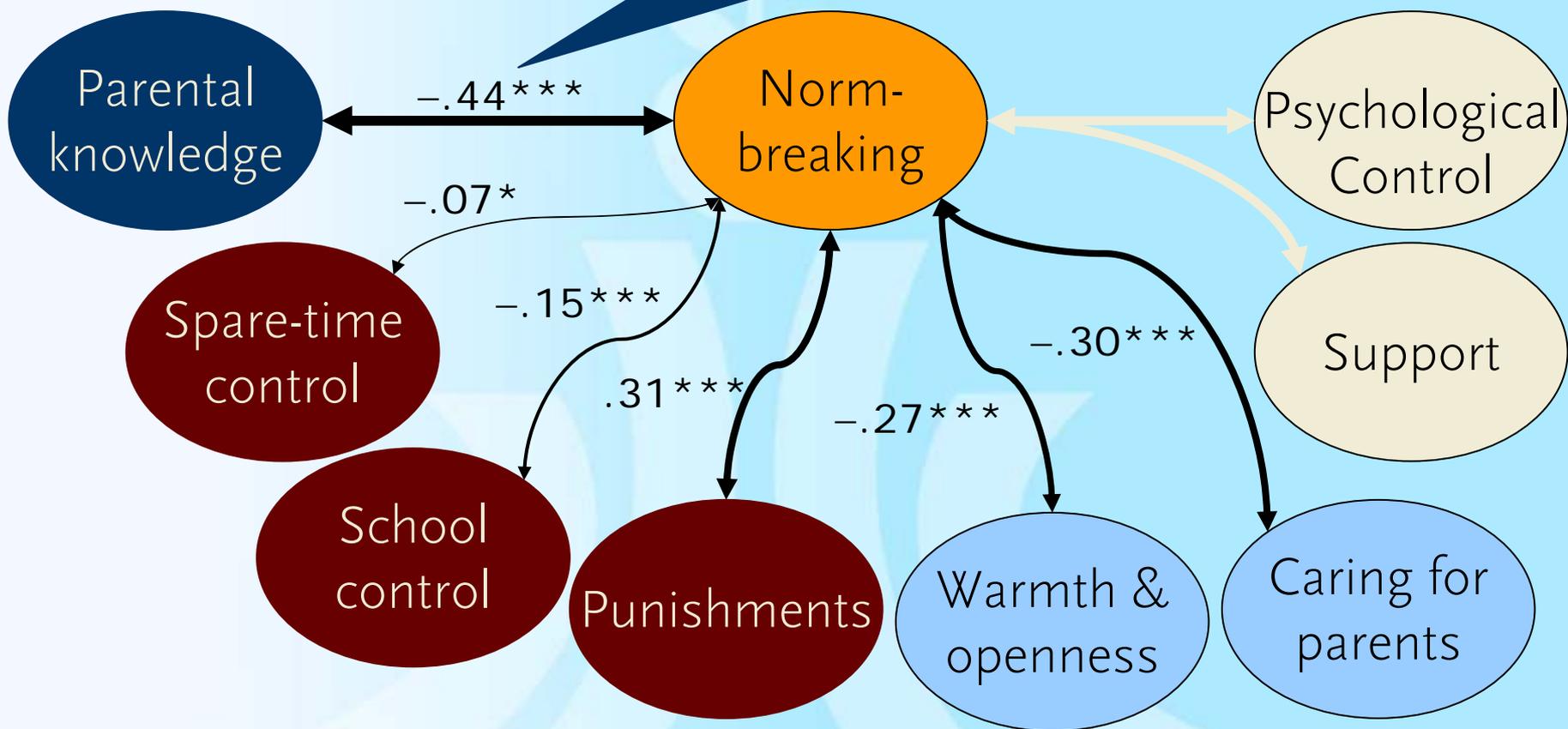


Zero-order associations with normbreaking



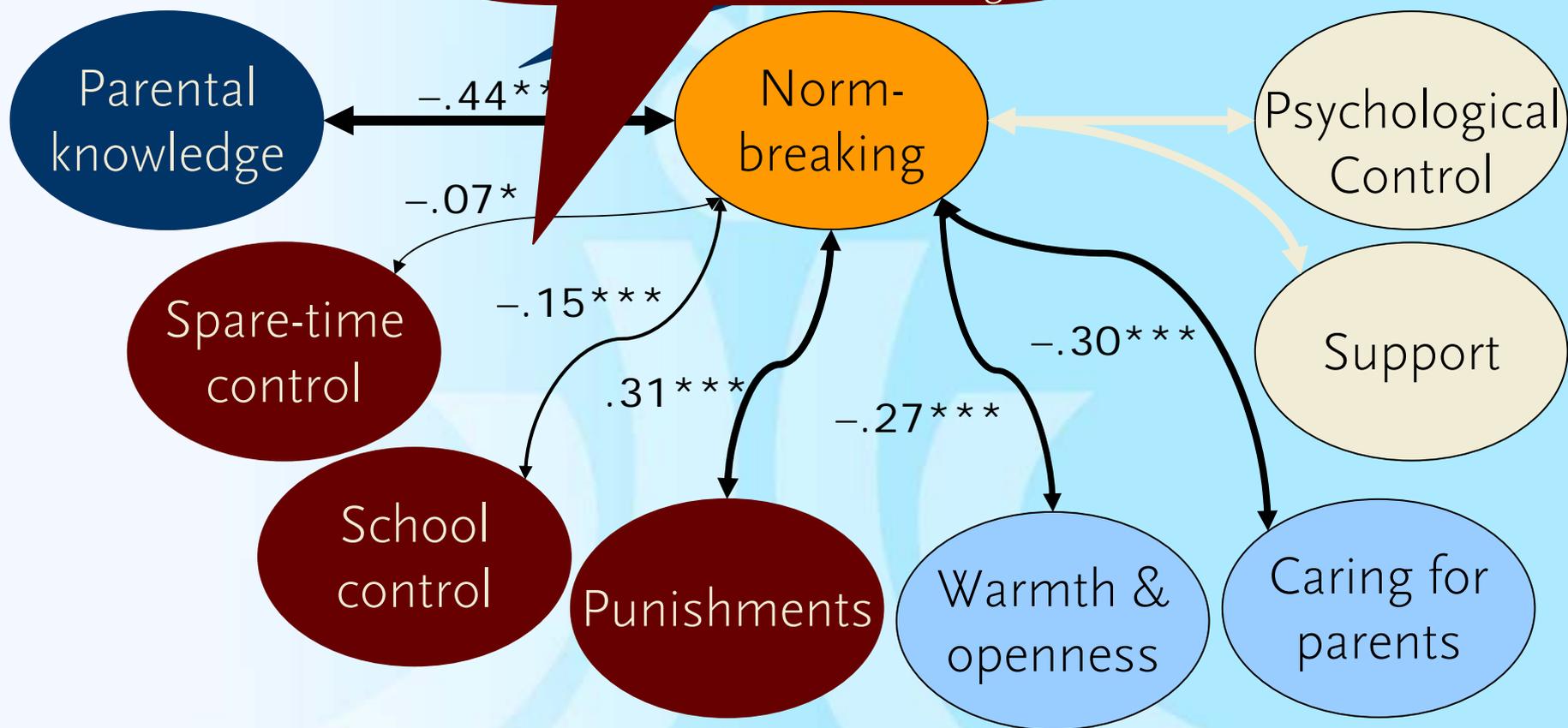
Zero-order associations with Norm-breaking

Strong association
knowledge-low normbreaking

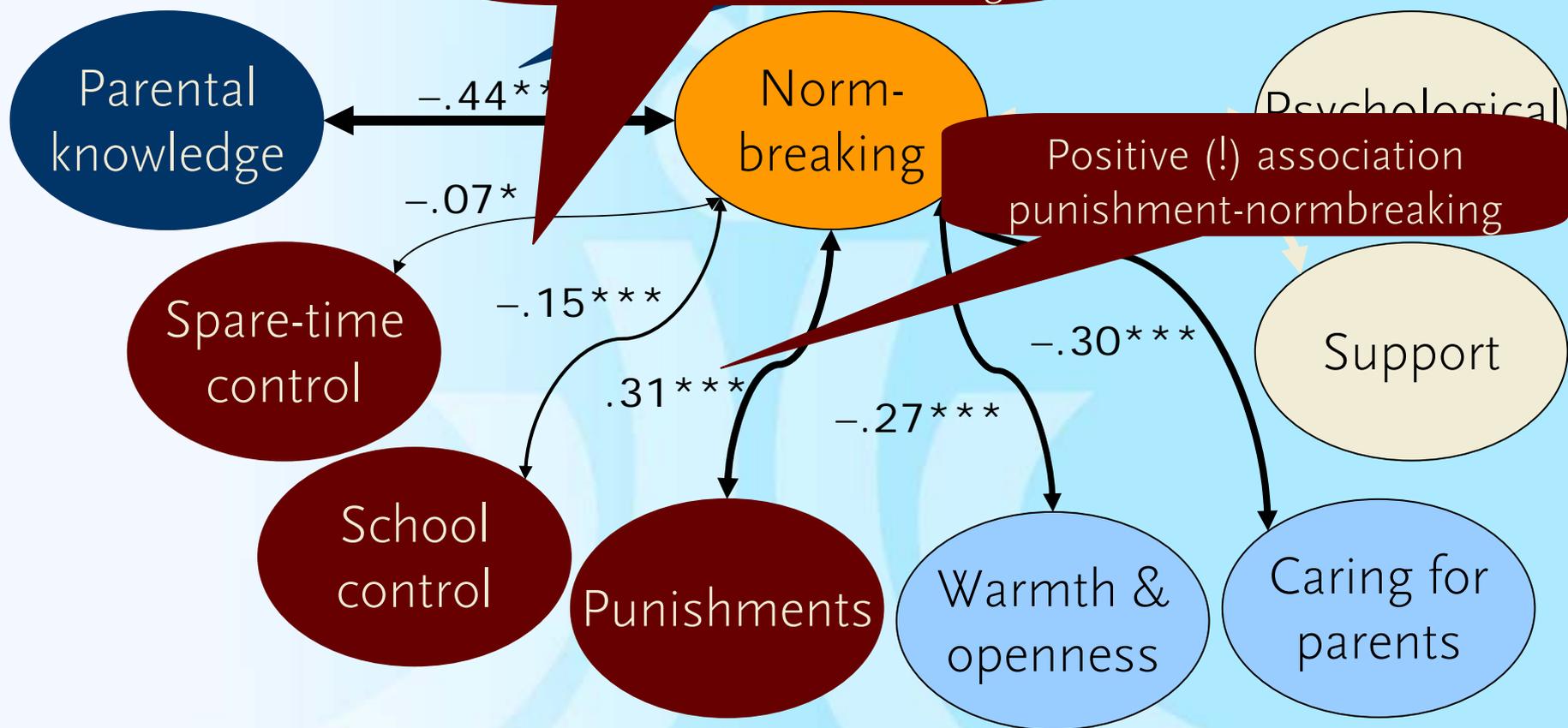


Zero-order associations with Norm-breaking

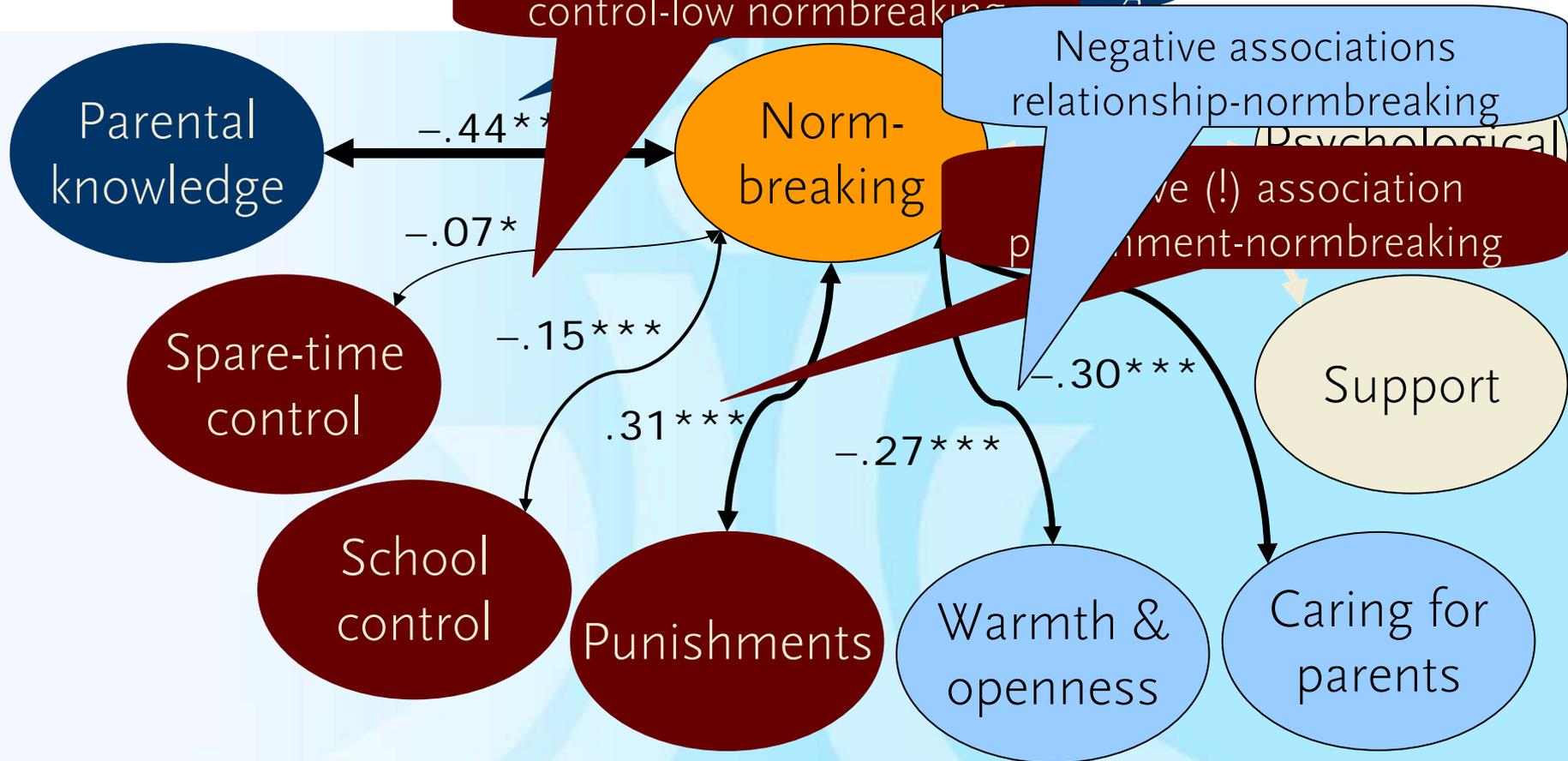
Only weak associations
control-low normbreaking



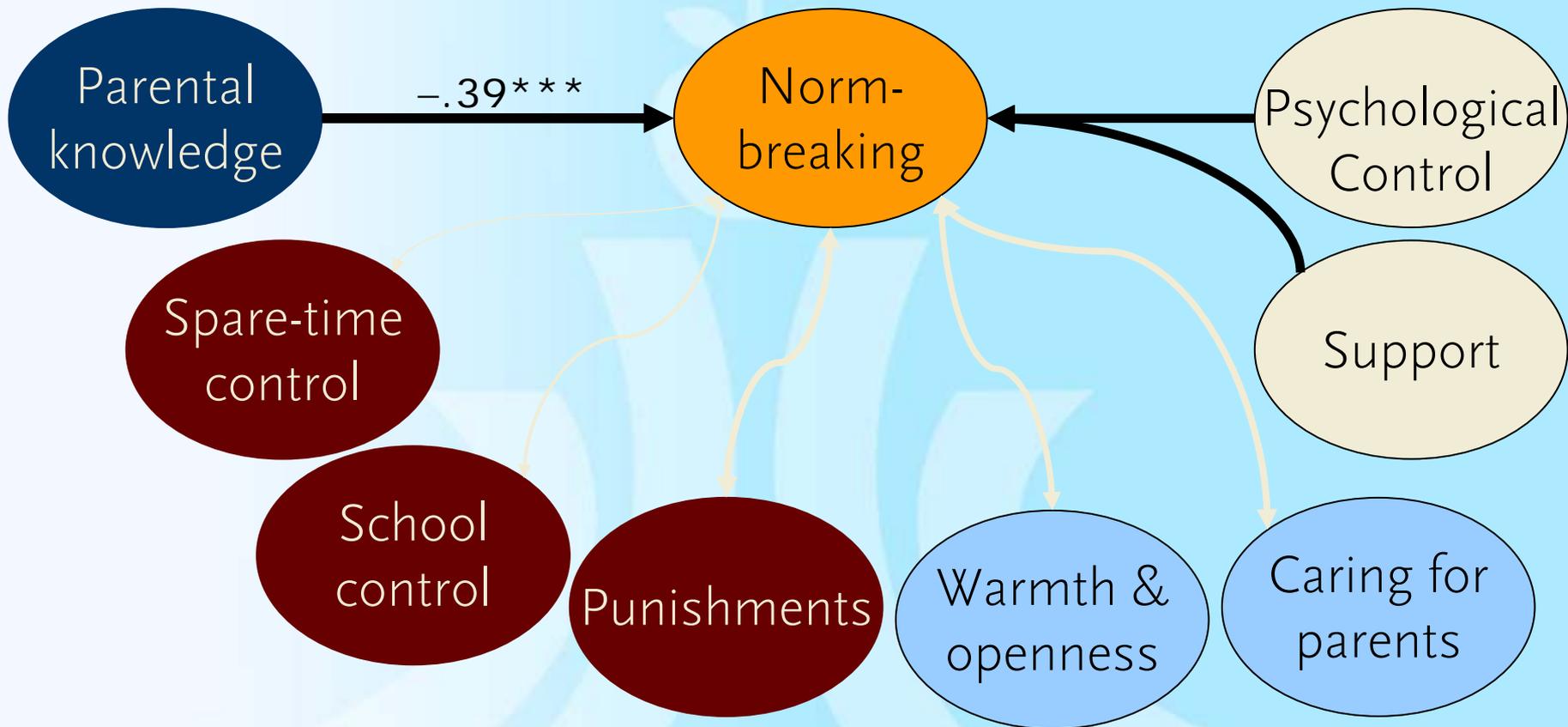
Zero-order associations with Norm-breaking



Zero-order associations with Norm-breaking

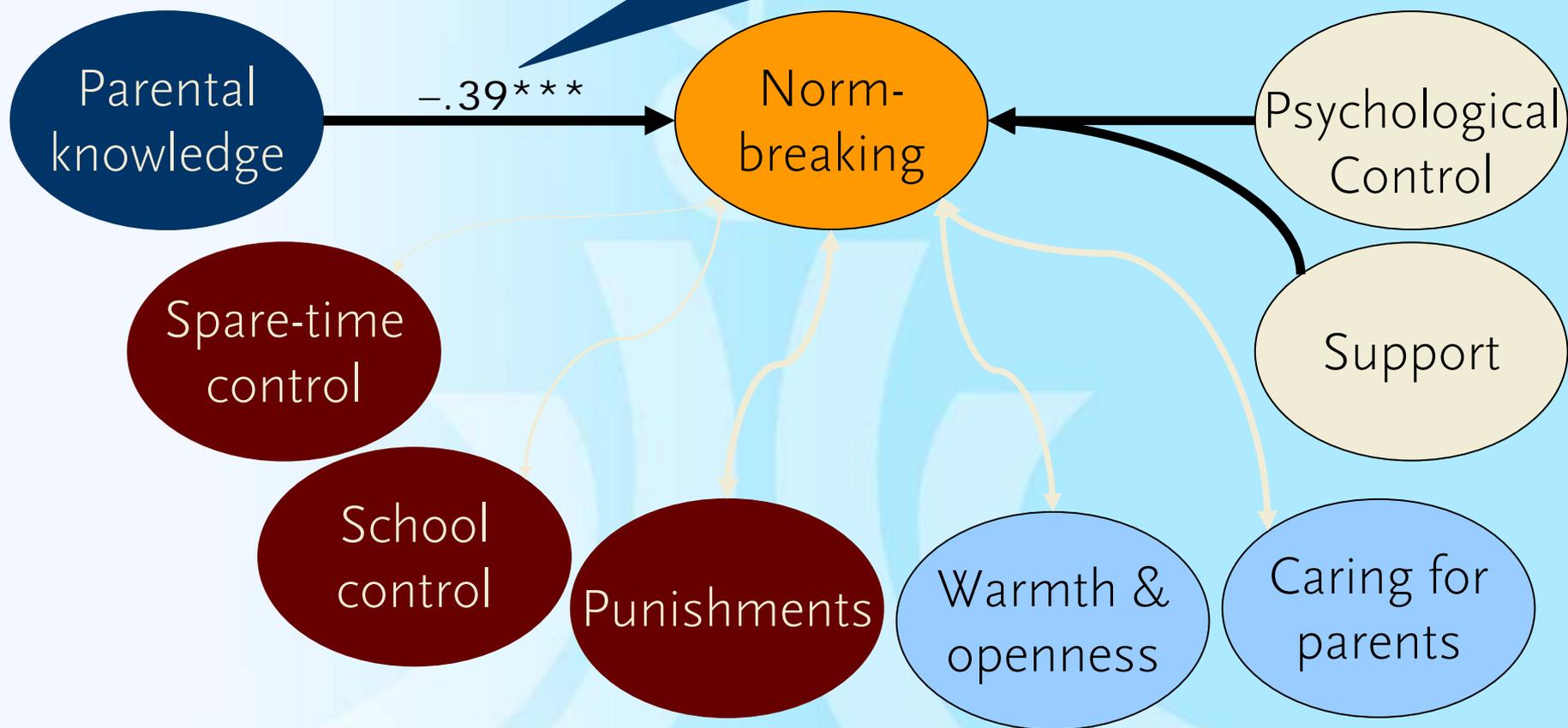


Unique effect of knowledge on normbreaking

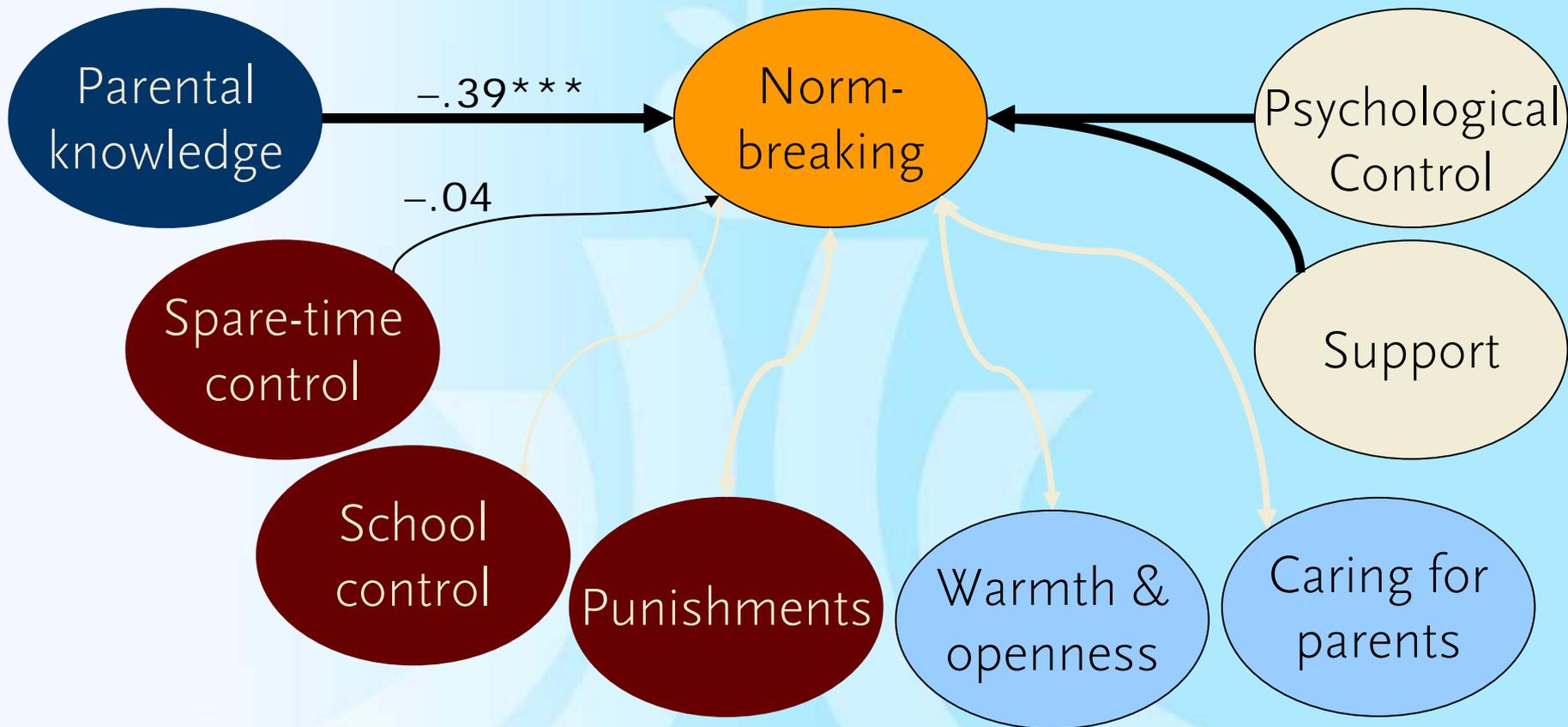


Unique effect of Norm-breaking

Unique effect
almost same size

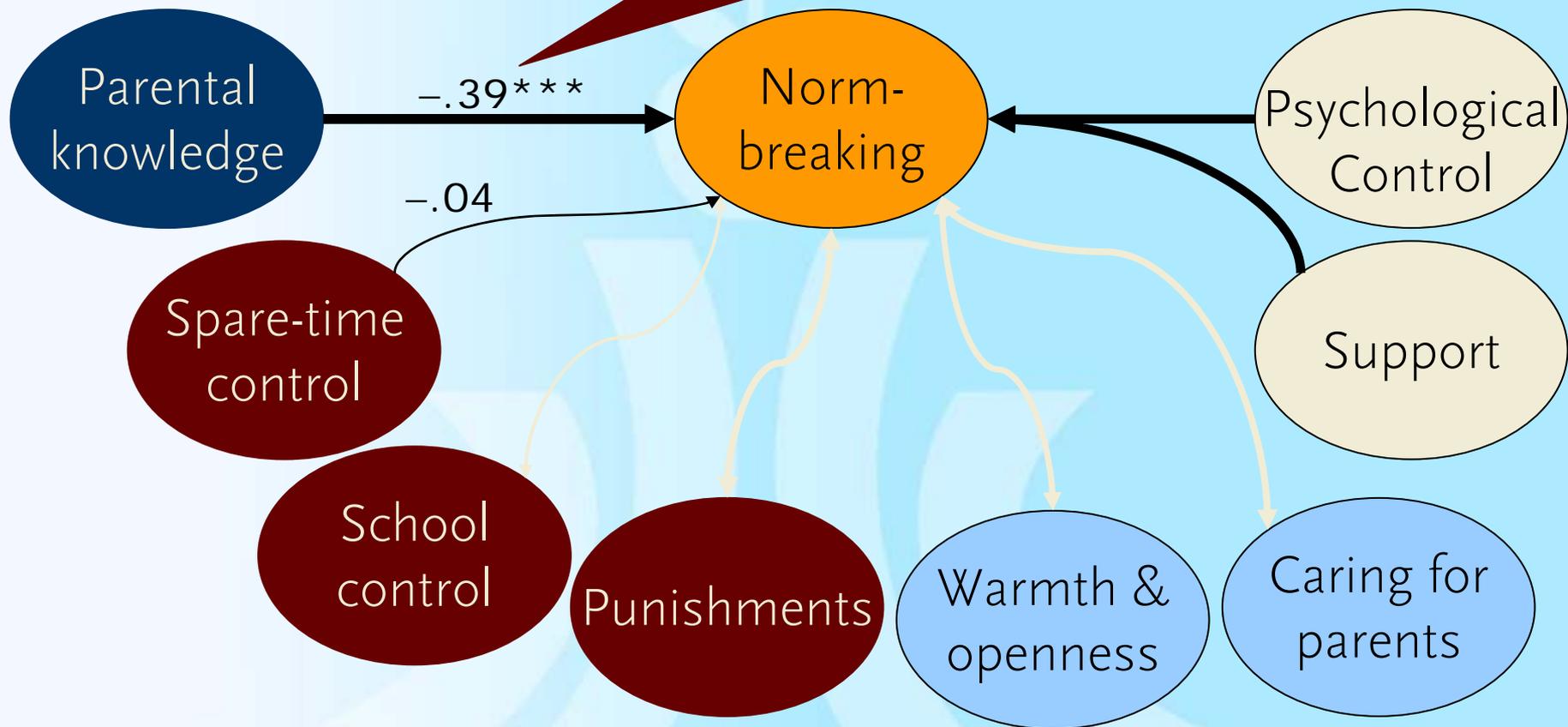


What does explain the effect of knowledge?

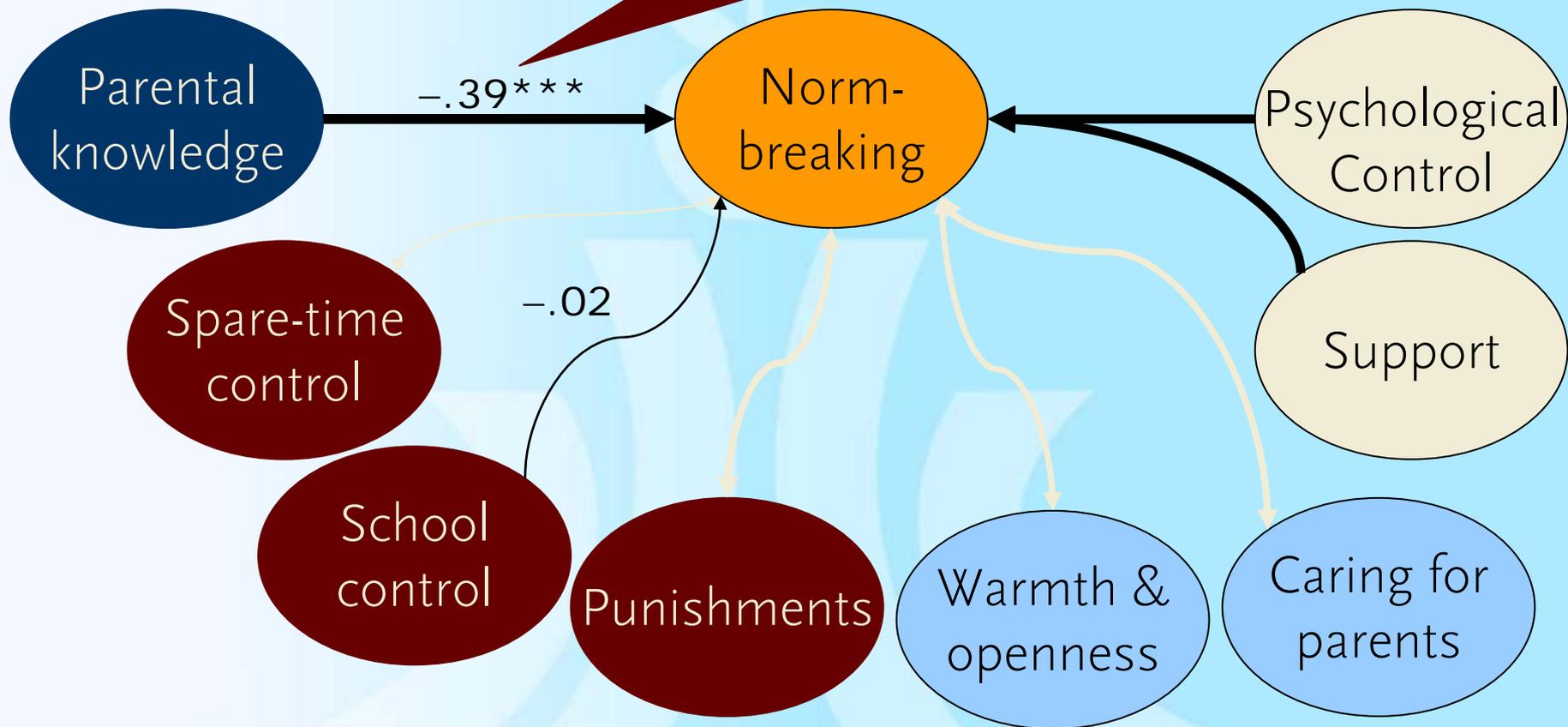


What does explain **Norm-breaking** knowledge?

Spare-time control does not.



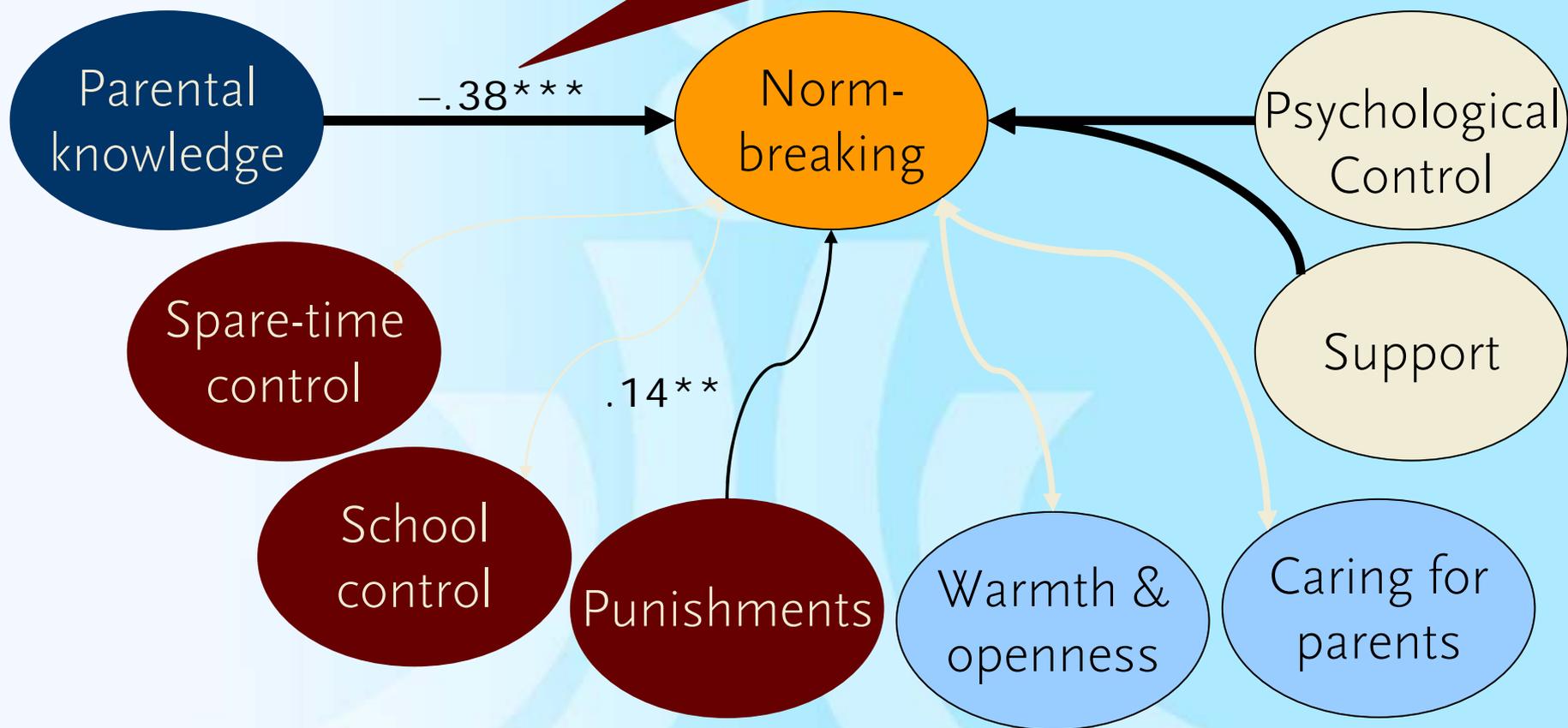
What does explain **School control does not.** ledge?



What does explain

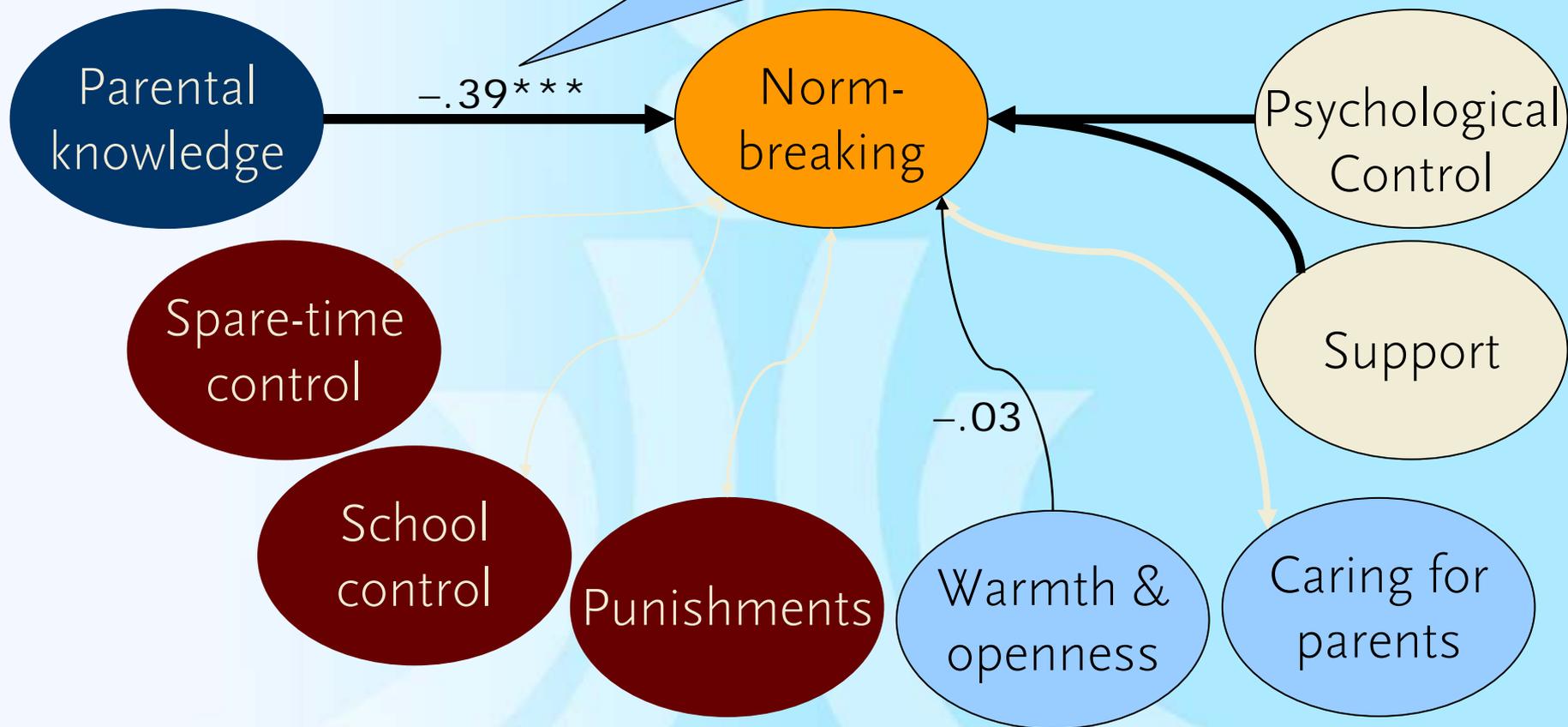
Punishments do partly.
But this type of control
increases normbreaking.

ledge?



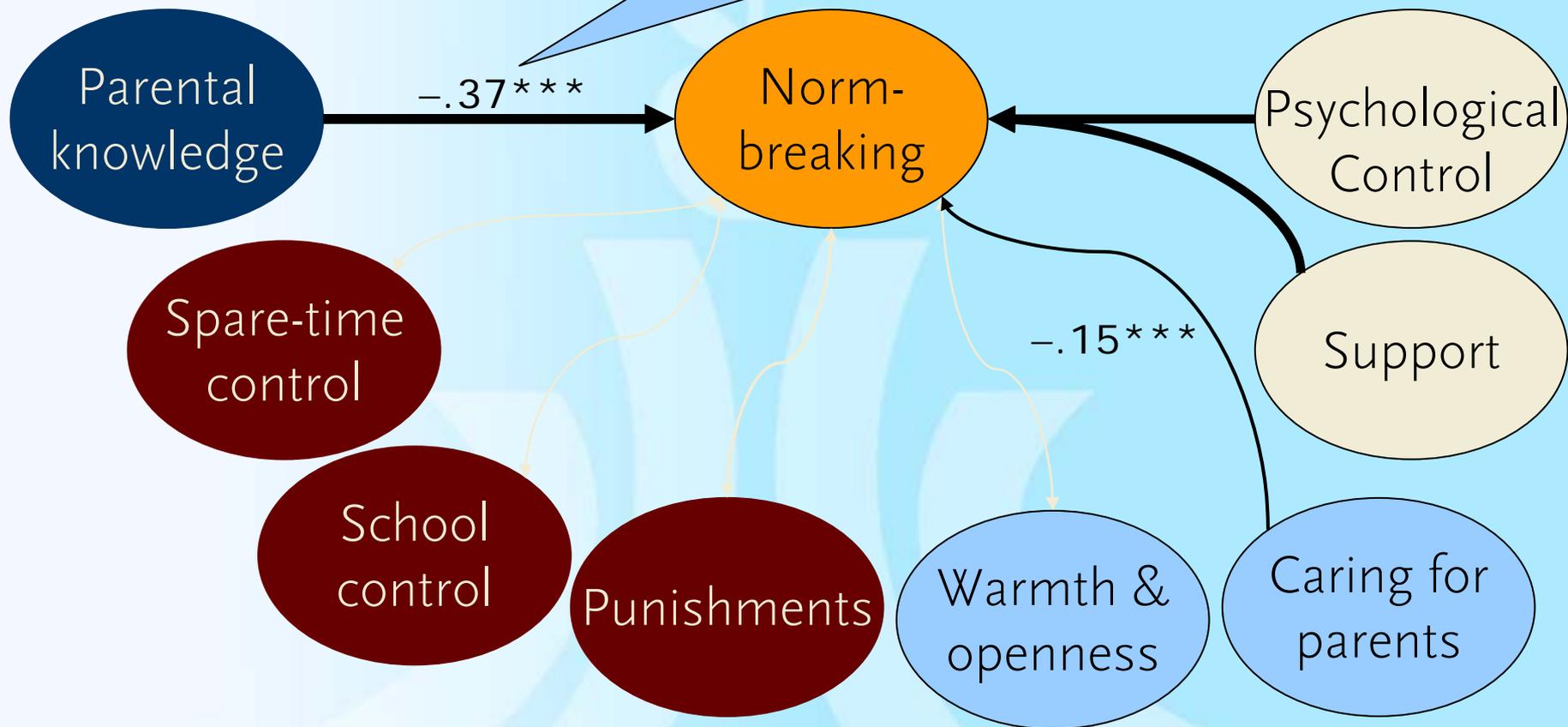
What does explain Norm-breaking? Knowledge?

Warmth & openness
do not.



What does explain **Norm-breaking** knowledge?

Caring for parents
does partly.



Summary and conclusion

- Relationship processes explain parental knowledge better than behavior control variables
 - None of the behavior control variables can explain parental knowledge effects on normbreaking and is related to low normbreaking
 - Caring for parents (a relationship variable) on the contrary, does explain part of the effect of knowledge
- ⇒ Thus, Stattin & Kerr's critique against the use of parental knowledge as a measure of behavior control has been replicated
- In contrast to previous studies, psychological control and parental support were statistically controlled. Therefore, this study tested Barber's interpretation of the *unique* effect of parental knowledge – and rejected it.

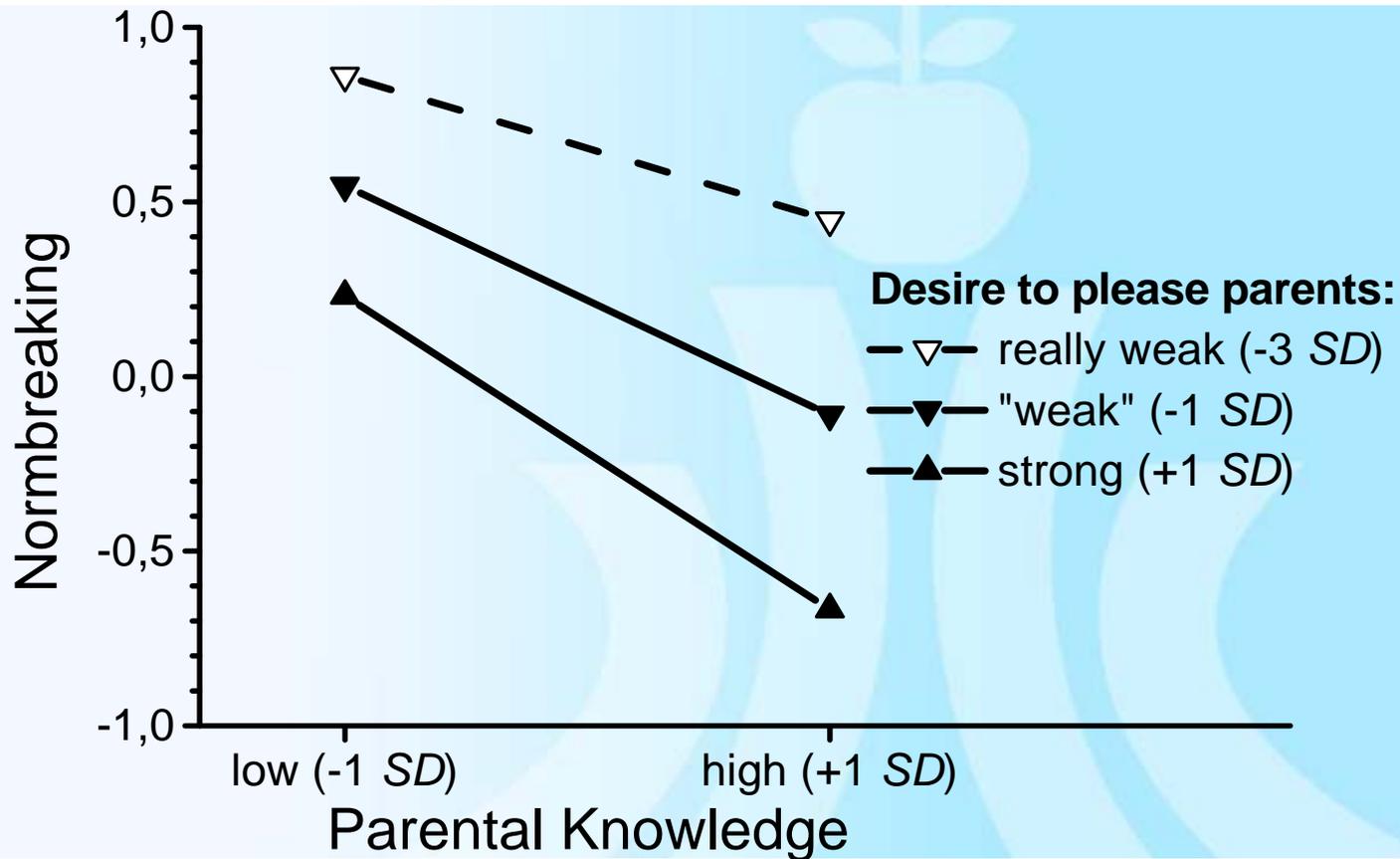
The alternative view

- Is there a better interpretation of parental knowledge?
- Perhaps one that allows for seeing adolescents as active subjects rather than mere objects, exposed to some “parenting style”?
 - e.g., Muchow, Bronfenbrenner, Sameroff, Noack, Kuczynski...
- Suggestion: knowledge = knowledge, i.e. adolescents’ expectancy that parents know or will know about their actions
- This expectancy might be part of an expectancy-value model:
- *If my parents will know about my normbreaking, and if I do not want to cause them trouble, I will not break norms.*

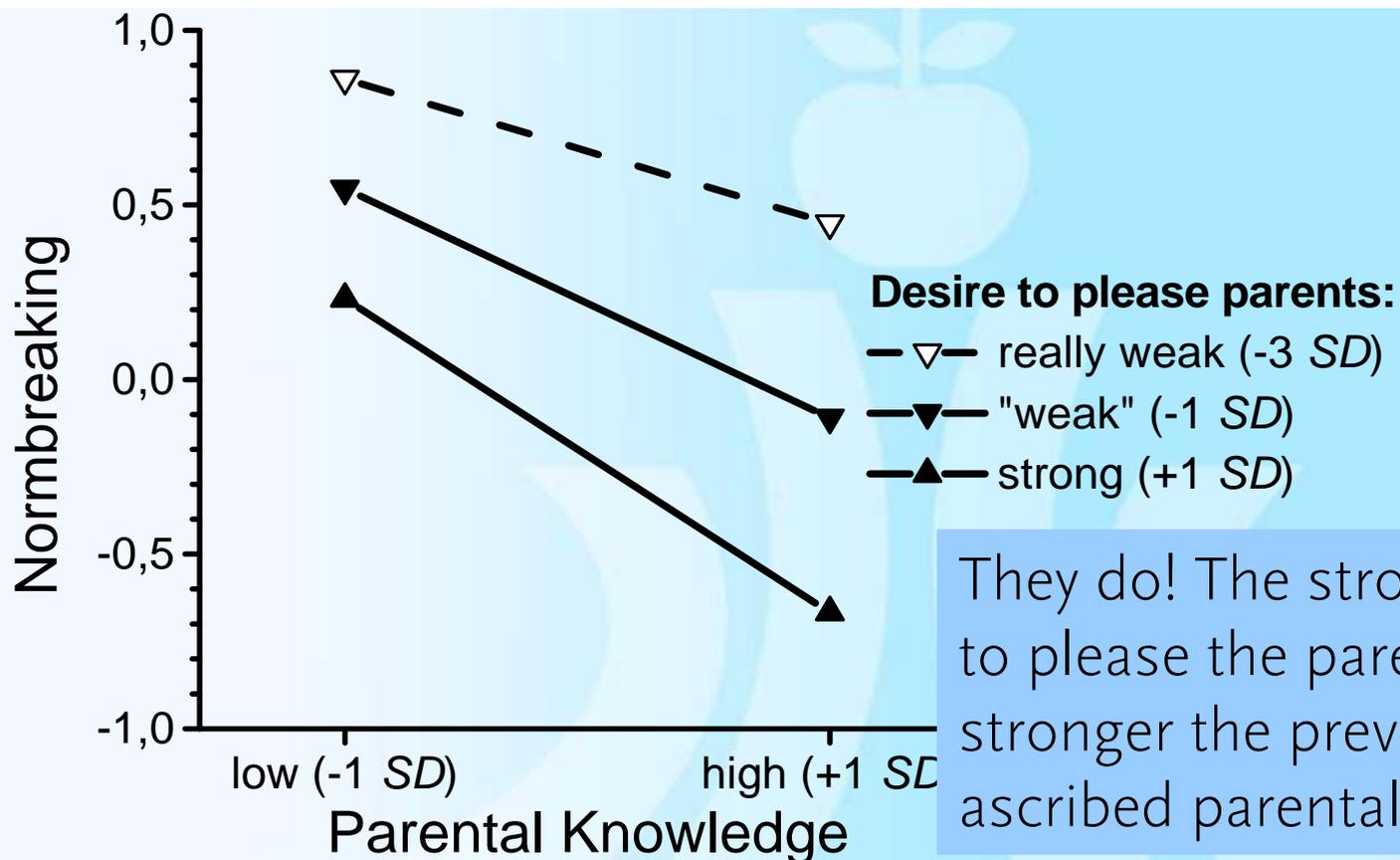
One more measure

- Desire to please parents (newly developed scale)
- Inspired by Youniss & Smollar (1985) who stated that this desire is common among youth
- E.g., “Every now and then, I like to make her/him happy” (9 + 9 items, $\alpha = .82/.85$)

Do ascribed knowledge and the desire to please the parents act together?



Do ascribed knowledge and the desire to please the parents act together?



They do! The stronger the desire to please the parents, the stronger the preventive "effect" of ascribed parental knowledge

Summary and final conclusion

- Even with Barber's sample, following closely his ideas of assessing the unique effects of parental knowledge, no evidence was found for Barber's interpretation of knowledge as a measure of behavior control.
- Instead, even the unique portion of parental knowledge had more to do with relationship processes
- But the largest part remained unexplained.
- I suggested a new look at knowledge: It might just be knowledge, the expectancy that parents (will) know
- Together with an appropriate value, the association of knowledge with low normbreaking was explained from an expectancy-by-value model
- This model regards adolescents as active subjects rather than passive objects of trait-like parenting styles.
- Take the specifics of this model as unreliable: Interaction effects are hard to replicate, and the study is only cross-sectional, thereby precluding safe causal interpretations. What I want to show is that there are alternatives to a uni-directional parenting model. Models which assume adolescents as active agents of their development, as people who assess their environment and act according to their values and goals, can fit to the data. This paper that began as a critique against a questionable operationalization thus ends suggesting a view on an active adolescent, beyond Barber's and others' unidirectional parenting models. The idea of the developing individual as active is not particularly new (e.g., Muchow & Muchow, 1935; Stern, 1900) but worth to be implemented in our theories.