

It Takes Two to Tango Teen Internalizing and Externalizing Problems Are Predicted by the Interaction of Parent and Teen Behaviors

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We know a bit about main effects

Adolescents' internalizing problems are associated with...

- Parent behaviors:
 - lack of support
 - psychological control – disrespect
 - likely also overcontrol
- Adolescent behaviors:
 - secrecy
 - likely also lack of disclosure

Adolescents' externalizing problems are associated with...

- Parent behaviors:
 - lack of behavioral control (but only to small extent & if not feeling overly controlled)
 - overcontrol
 - psychological control – disrespect
 - lack of support? (mixed findings)
- Adolescent behaviors:
 - secrecy
 - disclosure?

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But we know less about interaction effects

- We are aware of only one study that explored the interplay of these parent and adolescent behaviors
 - Adolescent disclosure and low delinquency more strongly associated if parents highly supportive (Keijsers et al., 2009)
- Systematic study of interactions between main predictors of internalizing and externalizing problems is lacking

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Plan of study

- “Dependent” variables
 - Internalizing problems: depressive symptoms, loneliness, low self-esteem
 - Externalizing problems: delinquency, aggression, drug/alcohol use
- Parent “predictors”
 - support
 - psychological control – disrespect
 - behavior control
 - overcontrol
- Child “predictors”
 - disclosure
 - secrecy
- And, of course, the parent x child interaction
 - Hypothesis: The 2 (child) x 4 (parent) x 6 (dependent variables) = 48 effects will vary.

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Sample and Procedure

- $N = 1,281$. First wave of longitudinal study.
- Selected schools in a town of 36,000 and two nearby villages
- Grades 7-10 (age about 13-17, $M = 15.2$, $SD = 1.2$)
- 51.4% girls
- 3/5 native Swedes, 1/5 Sweden-born to immigrant parents, 1/5 foreign-born
- Majority of immigrants from other European countries or the Middle East
- Adolescents filled out questionnaires at school.



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Main Effects

Predictor	Internalizing			Externalizing		
	Depression	Loneliness	Low Self-Esteem	Delinquency	Aggression	Drug/Alcohol
Support	-	-	-	<i>ns</i>	<i>ns</i>	-b
Psych. Ctrl.	+	+	+	+	+	+b
Beh. Ctrl.	+	+	+	<i>ns</i>	<i>ns</i>	-
Overcontrl.	+	+	+	+	+b	+b
Disclosure	-	-a	-a	-	-	-
Secrecy	+	+	+	+	+	+

a Spurious in combination with support
b Spurious in combination with secrecy

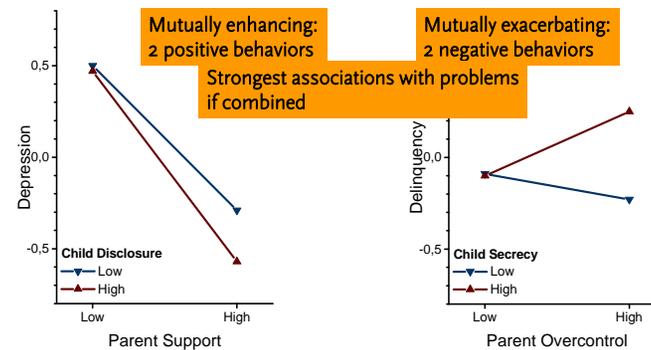
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Interaction Effects

- 13 of 48 interaction effects significant at $p < .05$ (which itself is significant at $p < .001$)
- Visual inspection: Very different interaction effects...
- Significant interaction effects can be summarized into 5 patterns

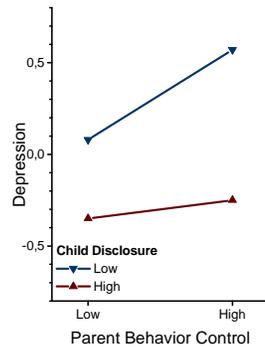
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Patterns 1 & 2: Mutually Enhancing and Mutually Exacerbating



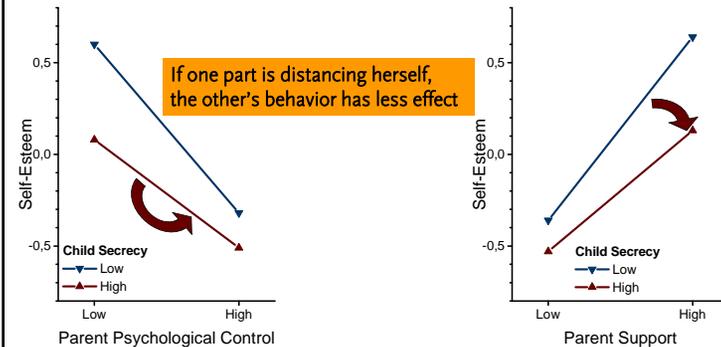
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Pattern 3: Protective Effect



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Patterns 4 & 5: Relationship Split and Sabotage



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Where do we find these effects?

- In order to find a systematic pattern, we should not just look at those interaction effects that happen to be significant. Rather, look at all 48 interaction effects, taking effect size into account
- ANOVA of all 48 *t* values of interaction effects, dependent of
 - prediction of internalizing vs. externalizing
 - 4 parental behaviors
 - 2 child behaviors
- *t* values explained by combination of parent x child behaviors ($\eta^2 = .26$), moderated by internalizing vs. externalizing ($\eta^2 = .38$)

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Where do we find these effects?

Parent Behavior	Internalizing		Externalizing	
	Child Disclosure	Child Secrecy	Child Disclosure	Child Secrecy
Support	Mutually enhancing: Depression, self-esteem	Sabotage: Self-esteem		Protection: Delinquency
Psychological control – disrespect		Relationship split: Self-esteem	Sabotage: Aggression	Mutually exacerbating: Delinquency
Behavior control	Protection: Depression, loneliness, self-esteem			
Overcontrol		Relationship split: Self-esteem	Protection: Delinquency	Mutually exacerbating: Delinquency

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These three effects not consistent across kinds of externalizing

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Disclosing might open up for beneficial effects of support. Or, "depressed talk" diminishes support.

Secretive children's internalizing less associated with parental behaviors → Less parental influence? Less influence on parents?

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May be vicious circles of child externalizing and secrecy, and parents' controlling and aversive behaviors, each making the other worse

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Disclosing children might accept more control, thereby being less affected by it.

Conclusions

- Cross-sectional study does not allow for final causal conclusions
- But ample evidence for need to look at the combinations of parents' and children's behaviors when studying internalizing and externalizing behaviors
- How parents' and children's behaviors interact depends on the respective behaviors and the kind of problem behavior
- Important hypotheses generated by this study
 - Secrecy creates a distance in the parent-adolescent relationship so that associations between parenting and internalizing are weakened.
 - But secrecy, aversive and controlling parenting, and externalizing problems might exacerbate each other (see also Hawk et al., 2013).
 - Disclosure might indicate an openness to parental control, even in its more extreme forms ⇒ less aversive effects of control and overcontrol.

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