
Examining the Effects of Parenting Styles on Offline and Online Adolescent Peer Problems

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Abstract

Past research has focused on investigating parenting styles in the context of various positive and negative outcomes. We examined the relationship between parenting styles and offline and online adolescent peer problems. We found that parental involvement was

associated with fewer peer problems, and strictness/supervision was associated with less frequent online victimization. Higher levels of autonomy granting parenting were associated with less peer problems and online victimization. Further, teens who experienced high levels of peer problems experienced less online victimization when their parents granting them more autonomy, than parents who restricted their autonomy. The findings of this paper set a foundation for parents to consider taking more authoritative approaches to dealing with their teens' offline peer problems as to not exacerbate teens' online risk experiences.

Author Keywords

Adolescent Online Safety; Online Victimization; Peer Problems

ACM Classification Keywords

K.4.1 [Public Policy Issues]: Ethics, Human safety, Privacy

Introduction

There has been an abundance of research concerning the influence of parenting styles on positive and negative youth outcomes [7]. Within the ACM SIGCHI community, researchers have shown that tensions exist between parents and teens when it comes to technology use and rule-setting in the home [2,8,9,10].

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Sidebar 1. Measures

1) **Peer Problems** was measured using a pre-validated scale from the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) [4].

2) **Online Victimization** was based upon Wisniewski et al.'s [9] measures for teen online victimization, including cyberbullying, sexual solicitation, exposure explicit contents, and personal privacy breaching.

3) **Parenting Style** was measured using Steinberg et al.'s [7] Parenting Style Index (PSI) using the following three scales: 1) Involvement, 2) Strictness/supervision, and 3) autonomy granting.

However, there is limited research examining how parenting style effects on both offline and online victimization. In this research, we conduct an exploratory analysis based on survey data we collected from 215 parent-teen pairs to answer the following research question: *How does parenting style effect online and offline victimization of teens?*

Background

Livingstone and Smith argue that teens are not any more vulnerable to online risks as they are to offline risks [5]. Unfortunately, there is limited research focusing on how parenting styles influence these online and offline vulnerabilities in relation to one another. For example, Eastin et al. [3] found that technological monitoring on home computers was primarily practiced by authoritarian and authoritative parents, and Ybarra et al. [11] found that such monitoring software reduced the odds of teens being exposed to sexual explicit materials online. Fewer studies have looked directly at the effects of parenting style on offline peer problems and online victimization more holistically.

Methods*Participant Recruitment*

Using a Qualtrics Panel, we recruited parent and teen pairs from across the United States. Participants were sent a survey link and asked to complete the consent/assent process. Then, parents and teens completed their survey portions separately; parents first, followed by teens. In **Sidebar 1**, we describe the pre-validated constructs measured in our survey. Baumrind [1] divided parenting styles in four different categories based on parents' varying levels of responsiveness (takes care of child's needs, but promotes autonomy) and demandingness (exerts control): 1) authoritative, 2) authoritarian, 3)

permissive, and 4) neglectful. Based on these categories [1], authoritative parents are high on all three PSI scales, while authoritarian parents are only high on the strictness/supervision scale [7].

Data Analysis Approach

We used SmartPLS 3.0 [6] and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) to understand the relationships between our constructs. A saturated model was built using all possible paths between constructs that tested both direct and indirect effects. Next, we tested for all possible moderating effects between parenting style dimensions and teen online and offline problems. Finally, we removed non-significant paths from the saturated model to get our final model, shown in **Figure 1**.

Results

Construct validity and descriptive statistics for all our model constructs are shown in **Table 1**.

Table 1: Reliability and Descriptive Statistics

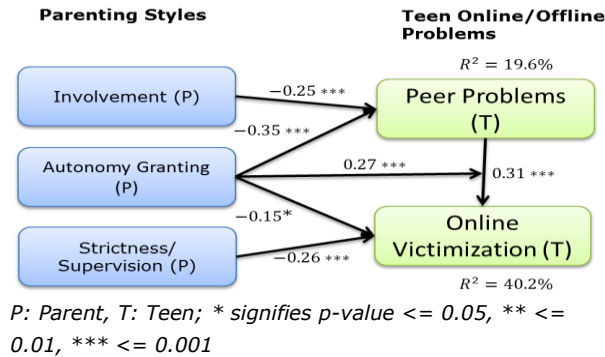
Model Constructs	Cronbach's α	Mean (SD)
Parenting Styles (P)		
Involvement	0.84	4.28 (0.52)
Strictness/Supervision	0.89	4.44 (0.61)
Autonomy Granting	0.83	3.34 (0.74)
Peer Problems (T)	0.74	2.11 (0.76)
Online Victimization (T)	0.94	1.76 (1.10)

P: Parent, T: Teen; SD: Standard Deviation

Peer Problems and Online Victimization

Our structural model was statistically significant and explained 19.6% of the variance in peer problems and

Figure 1: Structural Equation Model



40.2% of the variance in teen online victimization. In **Figure 1**, peer problems and online victimization are significantly and positively correlated with one another. Parental involvement was associated with lower levels of peer problems; strictness/supervision was negatively associated with online victimization. Meanwhile, autonomy granting was associated with lower levels of both teen problem constructs.

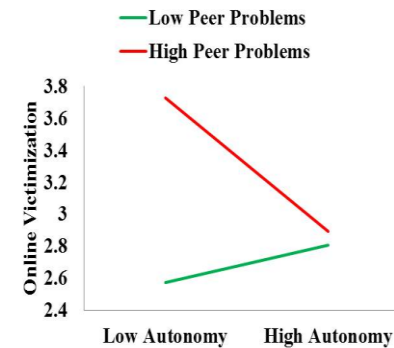
Moderating Effects of Parenting Styles

Next, we tested for moderating effects between the different parenting style dimensions (involvement, strictness/supervision, and autonomy granting) on peer problems and online victimization. We found low autonomy granting parenting combined with an increased level of offline peer problems, was associated with the highest levels of teen online victimization, shown in **Figure 2**.

Discussion

Overall, we confirmed that *more* authoritative parenting (high involvement, high autonomy granting, and high

Figure 2: Moderating Effect of Autonomy * Peer Problems on Online Victimization



strictness/supervision) leads to the most optimal youth outcomes - fewer peer problems and online victimization. We also found a moderating effect where low autonomy granting parenting combined with an increased level of peer problems, equated to higher levels of teen online victimization.

These findings have strong implications for supporting more optimal youth outcomes. Prior research [10] found that parents have the tendency to punish their teens and restrict their online access when they become aware of their teens online risk encounters. Yet, our results suggest that doing so may only exacerbate the problem instead of protecting teens. Instead, parents should consider taking authoritative approaches that provide the nurturing support, strictness, yet understanding and space (i.e., autonomy) that teens need, so that they can learn from their negative online risk experiences. But, unfortunately, other research shows that currently available systems (e.g., parental control apps) focus more on applying control and restriction [8].

Sidebar 2. Acknowledgements

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Conclusion

The findings and implications of this paper sets a foundation for parents to consider taking more authoritative approaches to dealing with their teens' online risk experiences. Also, we confirmed that offline problems (peer) are closely related to online problems. Regarding limitations of our work, we used cross-sectional data that does not confirm causal effects. In future work, researchers should conduct longitudinal studies to explore causal effects between parenting styles and teen online/offline problems.

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