

1-1-2016

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### **Recommended Citation**

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Mothers' Management of Adolescent Peer Relationships and Adolescents' Social Adjustment

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## Abstract

The current study investigated the relationship between mothers' peer management behaviors (consulting, guiding, prohibiting, rules about peer relationships, and supervising) and adolescent's social adjustment. Existing observational and questionnaire data from a larger study was used for this study. The sample included 70 mother-adolescent dyads. Adolescent males (48.6%) and females (51.4%) between the ages of 10-15 years ( $M_{age} = 12.39$ ,  $SD = 1.64$ ) participated. Participants completed a series of tasks; questionnaires, video recorded conversations about peers, interviews with the research staff, and a computerized manipulation of social exclusion. During the conversation about peers, participants completed a hypothetical task and a conflict task. In the hypothetical task, dyads were given cards with hypothetical situations and were asked to discuss them as if they were real life situations. In the conflict task, dyads discussed conflicts they previously reported on a questionnaire. The video recorded conversations were later analyzed and coded for management behaviors by trained graduate and undergraduate research assistants. A series of independent-sample  $t$  tests examined gender differences in the management behaviors and in adolescent's social adjustment. The independent-sample  $t$  tests showed that mothers engage in more guiding management behaviors with girls than with boys, girls engage in higher levels of prosocial behavior than boys, and girls reported more positive friendship quality than boys. Regression analyses revealed only one significant finding, higher levels of supervising were related to lower levels of friendship conflict.

### Mothers' Management of Adolescent Peer Relationships and Adolescents' Social Adjustment

As children become older and enter the adolescent stage, parents often become concerned about their adolescent's activities and their peer relationships. Parents might begin restricting the time adolescents spend with peers or they might restrict the peers their adolescents have. Yet, parents may not be aware of the different social outcomes that these restrictions have on their adolescent. Research on management of peer relationships has shown that parents have an influence on adolescent's peer relationships. Parents influence adolescents' peer relationships through two types of parenting influences: indirect influences and direct influences. Indirect influences are parenting behavior that are not specifically directed at peer relationships, but still have an effect on peer relationships. Examples of indirect influences are parenting styles or attachment (Mounts & Kim, 2009). Direct influences are parenting practices, such as parental management of peer relationships, intended to influence adolescents' peer relationships (Mounts & Kim, 2009).

In this study I will focus on direct parenting influences (parental management of peers) because research suggests that direct parenting influences are more responsive to change compared with indirect parenting influences. Investigating the relationship between peer relationships and social adjustment is important because research on management of peer relationships has shown to be linked to different adolescent social outcomes such as aggression, drug use, and delinquent behavior. I will investigate several aspects of management of peer relationships, developed from the framework of Ladd and LeSieur, (1995), including consulting, guiding, prohibiting, rules, and supervising.

*Consulting* can be described as a parental peer management behavior focused on problem solving related to peer relationships (e.g. directive social coaching or encouraging child to

participate in peer-related activity). Consulting is a predictor for positive friendship quality (Mounts, 2004). Literature on parental management of peers has shown consulting to be related to lower levels of adolescent delinquency activity and drug use (Mounts, 2004). Higher levels of consulting have also been found to be related to lower levels of relational and physical aggression in adolescents and higher levels of prosocial behavior (Gerardy, Mounts, Luckner, & Valentiner, 2015).

*Guiding* can be described as a parental peer management behavior that is directive in nature and may include communication of disapproval regarding peers (e.g. raising concerns about behavior/situation with friends or communicating negative opinion about friends). Guiding has been found to have an effect on friend selection. Adolescents whose parents engaged in higher levels of guiding selected friends with higher academic achievement and lower levels of antisocial behavior (Mounts, 2000). Higher levels of guiding has also been found to be related to more positive friendship quality (Mounts, 2004). A study found that higher levels of guiding have a negative effect on cooperation with peers (Mounts, 2011). Higher levels of guiding have also been found to be related to higher levels of relational aggression and to higher levels of social inclusion (Gerardy et al., 2015). Higher levels of guiding has also been related to having friends with lower levels of drug use (Mounts, 2002).

*Prohibiting* can be described as prohibiting peer relationships or activities (e.g. mother explicitly stating that child cannot do something with peers or that child cannot interact with particular peers). In research studies investigating prohibiting it was found that adolescents who reported moderate levels of parental prohibiting of peer relationships reported lower levels of drug use and delinquent behavior, having friends with lower drug use and delinquent behavior, as well as having a higher grade point average (Mounts, 2001).

*Rules regarding peers* can be defined as a parental peer management behavior focused on creating, referencing, or rationalizing rules regarding peers. Although many parental management behaviors have been studied, rules regarding peers is a management behavior that not many individuals have examined. In one investigation, Simpkins and Parke (2002) examined the way in which maternal play rules are correlated to children's social adjustment. They examined three types of rules; supervision rules, peer rules, and restriction rules in a group of sixth graders. They examined the way in which these rules were correlated to children's friendship quality, social behavior, and depression. The results showed that higher levels of supervision rules were related to boys being more prosocial, but also reporting higher feelings of depression in comparison with boys with lower levels of supervision rules. Peer rules were related to girls' aggression and boys' shyness, thus girls who had more play peer rules were more aggressive and boys with more play peer rules were shyer. In addition, boys who had more peer rules exhibited lower levels of prosocial behavior (Simpkins & Parke, 2002).

*Supervising* can be defined as a parental peer management behavior focused on constraining access to peers (e.g. limiting time with friends or obtaining information about friends). Most often, supervising is described as monitoring in the literature of parental management of peer relationships. Adolescents who reported that their parents used higher levels of supervising reported lower levels of drug use (Mounts, 2001), (Mounts, 2002). Higher levels of supervising were also related to the adolescent having a higher grade point average and the adolescent having friends with lower levels of drug use and higher grade-point-averages (Mounts, 2001). Higher levels of supervising have also been found to be related to adolescents engaging in lower levels of delinquency (Mounts, 2001).

## Present Study

The present study investigated the relationship between mothers' management behaviors (consulting, guiding, prohibiting, rules, and supervising) and adolescents' social adjustment. Two questions were of interest for this investigation. First, what is the relationship between supervising and social adjustment? Second, what is the relationship between rules about peer relationships and social adjustment? Based on the existing literature, three hypotheses were of interest. I hypothesized that higher levels of consulting would be related to a more positive social adjustment. For guiding, I hypothesized that higher levels of guiding would be related to poorer social adjustment. Finally, I hypothesized that higher levels of prohibiting would be related to poorer social adjustment.

## Method

### Participants

The sample included 70 mother-adolescent dyads. Adolescent males (48.6%) and females (51.4% between the ages of 10-15 years ( $M_{age} = 12.39$ ,  $SD = 1.64$ ) and their mothers ( $M_{age} = 40.80$ ,  $SD = 6.64$ , age range = 30-58 years) participated. The sample participants were 38.6% White/Caucasian/European, 25.7% African-American/African/Black, 11.4% Hispanic/ Latino/a, 2.9% Asian/Asian-American, and 21.4% of participants were multiracial. Maternal educational levels were: 22.9% had a professional or graduate degree, 21.4% had a 4-year college degree, 8.6% had some school beyond college, 38.6% had some college or 2-year degree, 5.7% finished high school, and 2.9% had some high school. Mothers reported family income; 15.7% had an income of less than \$20,000, 8.6% had an income between \$20,000- \$30,000, 12.9% had an income between \$30,001- \$40,000, 5.7% had an income between \$40,001-\$50,000, 10% had an income between \$50,001-\$60,000, 5.7% had an income between \$60,001-\$70,000, 12.9% had an

income between \$70,001-\$80,000, 2.9% had an income between \$80,001-\$90,000, 7.1% had an income of \$90,001-\$100,000, 17.1% had an income greater than \$100,000, and one mother did not report family income.

### **Procedure**

As part of a larger study, flyers were distributed to several middle schools in a rural city in the Midwestern United States. Families who were interested in participating contacted the laboratory to schedule an appointment in the laboratory. Upon arriving at the laboratory, the lead research assistant discussed the procedures with the dyad and described the consent from (mother) and the assent form (adolescent). Mothers and adolescents were given an opportunity to ask questions about the study procedure. They then completed their consent/assent forms.

After completing the consent/assent forms, mother-adolescent dyads participated in a series of tasks that included video recorded discussions about peers, questionnaires, interviews with research staff, and a computerized manipulation of social exclusion (Cyberball; Cheung & Williams, 2000). Each dyad received \$50 as compensation for their participation in the research project. Only the coded observational data and the questionnaire data were included for the present investigation.

### **Measures**

**Demographics.** Adolescents' mothers provided demographic information about adolescents and themselves by completing a short form, reporting on their own age and race/ethnicity adolescents' age, gender, and race/ethnicity, family income, and maternal level of education.

**Observed maternal management of peers.** Mother-adolescent dyads discussed peer issues privately in a lab setting while being video recorded. The video recordings were later



coded by trained graduates and undergraduates and they were coded for maternal management behaviors. The dyads were asked to discuss hypothetical situations as well as actual conflicts the mother-adolescent dyads had about peers.

***Observational tasks.*** There were two types of tasks that were including in the observations: hypothetical situations and conflicts.

***Hypothetical situations task.*** Participants were given cards containing eleven hypothetical situations regarding peer related issues to adolescents' lives (e.g., adolescents moved to a new town; adolescents' friends are in a disagreement). The order of the cards were counterbalanced so that all situations were discussed evenly across dyads. Dyads were asked to imagine that the situation was happening to them, to discuss the issue with each other as if it was happening in real life, and to draw from their real life experiences. They were allowed to spend as much time they felt that was needed on each card until they felt the situation was discussed thoroughly. Adolescents and mothers took turns initiating the hypothetical discussion. The discussion was timed for 10 minutes. Only the data from the discussions of the hypothetical situations are included in the present investigation.

***Conflict task.*** Dyads were presented with up to five cards describing a conflict about peers that had been reported by any member of the dyad in a questionnaire. Conflicts included areas of disagreement regarding peers (e.g., "In our family, spending time with friends before completing chores is somethings we have conflicts about" ; "In our family, choice of friends is something we have conflicts or disagreements about.") that had occurred in the past month as indicated by mothers and adolescents in a questionnaire. Items noted by both adolescent and mother were given priority in the discussion cards, followed by items that the adolescent or mother noted as highly or moderately occurring. The dyads were asked to attempt to reach an

agreement regarding the conflict and to discuss the issue until an agreement had been made. The conflict cards were framed to structure their discussion. They included questions like, “What is the conflict we have about (e.g., choice of friends)? “When do we have this conflict and who is involved? What usually happens? What can we do to solve this problem? (Please try to agree on a single situation)”. The discussion was timed for eight minutes.

**Observational coding.** An observational coding scheme was created as part of a larger study. Trained graduate and undergraduate students coded video recordings of mother-adolescent peer discussions. Inter-rater reliability was assessed. Trained graduate and undergraduates students coded all of the dyads utterances for specific maternal management behaviors (consulting, guiding, prohibiting, supervising, and rules). *Consulting* was defined as “parental peer-management behavior focused on problem solving related to peer relationships”, and included behaviors such as directive social coaching or encouraging the child in a peer-related activity. For the interrater reliability for consulting in the hypothetical task Cohen’s kappa = .82. *Guiding* was defined as “parental peer-management behavior that is directive in nature and may include communication of disapproval regarding peers”, and included behaviors such as raising concerns about behavior or situation with friends or communicating negative opinions and beliefs about friends. For the interrater reliability for guiding in the hypothetical task Cohen’s kappa = .81. *Prohibiting* was defined as “prohibiting peer relationships or activities/not allowing adolescent to engage in certain activities or be around particular peers”, and included behaviors such as mother explicitly stating that the child cannot do something with peers or that the child cannot interact with particular peers. Cohen’s kappa = .77 for prohibiting in the hypothetical task. *Supervising* was defined as “parental peer-management behavior focused on constraining access to peers”, and included behaviors such as limiting time with friends or obtaining

information about friends. The interrater reliability, calculated as Cohen's kappa, for supervising in the hypothetical task was .86. *Rules* was defined as "parental peer-management related behavior focused on creating, referencing, or rationalizing rules regarding peers", and included behaviors such as making rules regarding friends or referencing rules regarding friends. Cohen's kappa for rules about peers in the hypothetical task was .82.

**Adolescents' social adjustment.** To measure the adolescent's social adjustment four scales were used. The first scale is relational aggression, which is a subscale of the *Child Social Behaviors Scale* (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). There were 6 items on this scale. Cronbach's alpha for the scale was .74. The second scale is prosocial behavior, which is a subscale of the *Child Social Behaviors Scale* (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). There were 4 items on this scale. Cronbach's alpha for the scale was .77. The third scale is social phobia, which was measured by a subscale from the *Children's Anxiety Scale* (Spence, 1997). There were 6 items on this scale and the Cronbach's alpha was .65. The fourth scale is positive friendship quality, which was measured by the *friendship Quality Questionnaire* (Parker & Asher, 1993). There were 31 items on this scale. Cronbach's alpha for the scale was .95.

## Results

### Descriptive Statistics

Means and standard deviations for the management behaviors and the adolescents' social adjustment are presented in Table 1. Mothers engaged in high levels of consulting behavior ( $M = 16.95$ ), followed by guiding behavior ( $M = 6.36$ ). Mothers engaged in low levels of prohibiting ( $M = 0.77$ ). Independent sample t-test were conducted to examine whether there are sex differences between peer management behaviors and social adjustment. Mothers engaged in higher levels of guiding with girls ( $M = 7.23$ ) than with boys ( $M = 5.46$ ),  $t(63) = 2.02$ ,  $p = .04$ . It

was found that girls ( $M = 4.26$ ) engaged in more prosocial behavior than boys ( $M = 3.72$ ),  $t(67) = 3.0$ ,  $p = .004$ , girls ( $M = 3.14$ ) engaged in more positive friendship quality than boys ( $M = 2.61$ ),  $t(67) = 3.17$ ,  $p = .002$ , and girls ( $M = 6.60$ ) reported higher levels of social phobia than boys ( $M = 5.09$ ),  $t(67) = 1.95$ ,  $p = .05$ .

Table 2 presents the intercorrelations between the management behaviors and adolescents' social adjustment. There was a significant correlation between prosocial behavior and positive friendship quality ( $r = .64$ ,  $p = .000$ ). Higher levels of prosocial behavior were related to higher levels of positive friendship quality. There was a significant correlation between social phobia and friendship conflict ( $r = .39$ ,  $p = .001$ ). Higher levels of social phobia were related to higher levels of friendship conflict. There was a significant correlation between relational aggression and friendship conflict ( $r = .31$ ,  $p = .010$ ). Higher levels of relational aggression were related to higher levels of friendship conflict.

Hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to examine the research questions and the hypotheses. Each maternal peer management behavior was examined separately for each of the four outcome variables such that four regression analyses were conducted for each peer management variable.

### **Research Question 1**

Regression analyses were conducted to examine the relationship between supervising and social adjustment, for Step 1 of the regression sex was entered and for Step 2 supervising was entered. Results from the regressions examining the relationship between supervising and social adjustment outcomes are presented in Table 3. Higher levels of supervising were related to lower levels of negative friendship quality ( $B = -.25$ ,  $p = .05$ ). Supervising was not related to relational aggression, prosocial behavior, positive friendship quality, and social phobia.

**Research Question 2**

To examine the relationship between rules about peer relationships and social adjustment regression analyses were conducted. Adolescents' sex was entered for Step 1 of the regression analysis and rules about peer relationships was entered in Step 2. Results from the regressions examining the relationship between rules about peers and social adjustment outcomes are presented in Table 4. The relationship between rules about peers and relational aggression, prosocial behavior, positive friendship quality, friendship conflict, and social phobia were not significant.

**Hypothesis #1: I hypothesized that higher levels of consulting would be related to a more positive social adjustment**

Regression analyses were conducted to examine the relationship between consulting and social adjustment. Adolescents' sex was entered for Step 1 and consulting was entered in Step 2 of the regression analyses. Results from the regressions examining the relationship between consulting and social adjustment outcomes are presented in Table 5. The relations between consulting and the four aspects of adolescents' social adjustment were not significant.

**Hypothesis #2: I hypothesized that higher levels of guiding will be related to poorer social adjustment**

Regression analyses were conducted to examine the relationship between guiding and social adjustment, adolescents' sex was entered for Step 1 of the regression analyses and guiding was entered in Step 2. Results from the regression analyses examining the relationship between guiding and social adjustment outcomes are presented in Table 6. The relations between guiding and adolescents' social adjustment were not significant.

**Hypothesis #3: I hypothesized that higher levels of prohibiting will be related to poorer social adjustment**

Regression analyses were conducted to examine the relationship between prohibiting and social adjustment. Adolescents' sex was entered for Step 1 of the regression analyses and prohibiting was entered in Step 2. Results from the regression analyses examining the relationship between prohibiting and social adjustment outcomes are presented in Table 7. The relations between prohibiting and adolescents' social adjustment were not significant.

**Discussion**

In this study I addressed gender differences in mothers' management of peers and the relationship between five peer management behaviors and adolescent's social adjustment. The results show that girls engaged in more prosocial behavior, positive friendship quality, and social phobia than boys. These findings may suggest that girls experienced higher levels of these social outcomes due to cultural views on women. From a cultural perspective, girls are viewed as being more prosocial than boys. The cultural expectations that are placed on women might explain why girls also engaged in more social phobia than boys. The results also show that mothers engaged in higher levels of guiding behavior with girls than with boys. This finding is consistent with other literature findings on guiding. Previous research on guiding has found that higher levels of guiding is related to more positive friendship quality (Mounts, 2004). This may explain why girls experienced higher levels of positive friendship quality than boys. For the general question; what is the relationship between peer management behaviors and adolescent's social adjustment? Only one significant finding was found, higher levels of supervising were related to lower levels of negative friendship quality. Adolescents whose parents supervise their peer relationships have

less negative friendship quality than those adolescents whose parents do not engage in supervision.

Future replications of these study should examine whether there is a difference on how parents of different ethnic groups manage peer relationships. This might help explain the gender differences seen between girls and boys. Some ethnic groups are more conservative and protective over girls, it would be interesting to find out how this affects adolescent's social adjustment. Most of the literature on peer management is focused on mother and adolescent, future replications should examine fathers' management of peer relationship. Fathers may engage in management of peers differently than mothers. It is important to examine fathers' management of peer relationships because this will provide us with the overall big picture of how peer management is related to social adjustment.

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Table 1  
*Means and standard deviations of the major variables*

Variable	M	SD	Girls		Boys	
			M	SD	M	SD
Consulting	16.95	6.02	18.04	6.52	15.84	5.32
Guiding	6.36	3.61	7.23	3.88	5.46	3.12
Supervising	2.56	2.88	2.77	3.36	2.35	2.32
Rules	2.71	2.49	2.57	2.73	2.87	2.24
Prohibiting	0.77	0.89	0.78	1.03	0.75	0.74
Relational Aggression	1.61	0.53	1.55	0.47	1.67	0.58
Prosocial Behavior	4.0	0.80	4.26 <sub>a</sub>	0.75	3.72 <sub>a</sub>	0.76
Positive Friendship Quality	2.88	0.73	3.14 <sub>b</sub>	0.51	2.61 <sub>b</sub>	0.84
Friendship Conflict	0.64	0.73	0.73	0.87	0.54	0.52
Social Phobia	5.86	3.28	6.60 <sub>c</sub>	3.74	5.09 <sub>c</sub>	2.57

*Note.* Subscripts indicate significant sex differences.

Table 2

*Intercorrelations among the major variables*

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Consulting	1									
2. Guiding	0.17	1								
3. Supervising	0.19	0.08	1							
4. Rules	-0.06	0.07	-0.07	1						
5. Prohibiting	0.06	0.07	0.15	-0.14	1					
6. Positive Friendship	0.20	0.04	0.08	-0.05	0.01	1				
7. Friendship Conflict	-0.08	0.08	-0.24	0.07	0.04	-0.11	1			
8. Relational Aggression	-0.20	0.01	-0.03	-0.05	0.14	-0.17	0.31*	1		
9. Prosocial Behavior	0.04	-0.07	-0.03	-0.11	0.07	0.64*	-0.21	-0.15	1	
10. Social Phobia	0.12	-0.01	-0.10	0.19	-0.18	0.10	0.39*	0.21	0.10	1

Note. \*  $p < .01$

Table 3

*Regression of supervising on the outcome variables*

<u>Predictor</u>	<u>Outcome Variables</u>									
	Relational Aggression		Prosocial Behavior		Positive Friendship Quality		Friendship Conflict		Social Phobia	
	<u>B</u>	$\Delta R^2$	<u>B</u>	$\Delta R^2$	<u>B</u>	$\Delta R^2$	<u>B</u>	$\Delta R^2$	<u>B</u>	$\Delta R^2$
<u>Step 1</u>										
Sex	.12	.01	-.52	.10	-.60	.16	-.21	.02	-1.34	.04
<u>Step 2</u>										
Supervising	-.00	.00	-.02	.00	.01	.17	-.07*	.06	-.13	.01

*Note. \*  $p < .05$*

Table 4

*Regression of rules about peers on the outcome variables*

<u>Predictor</u>	<u>Outcome Variables</u>									
	Relational Aggression		Prosocial Behavior		Positive Friendship Quality		Friendship Conflict		Social Phobia	
	<u>B</u>	$\Delta R^2$	<u>B</u>	$\Delta R^2$	<u>B</u>	$\Delta R^2$	<u>B</u>	$\Delta R^2$	<u>B</u>	$\Delta R^2$
<u>Step 1</u>										
Sex	.12	.01	-.52	.10	-.60	.16	-.21	.02	-1.34	.04
<u>Step 2</u>										
Rules	-.01	.00	-.03	.01	.01	.00	.02	.01	.26	.04

Table 5

*Regression of consulting on the outcome variables*

<u>Predictor</u>	<u>Outcome Variables</u>									
	Relational Aggression		Prosocial Behavior		Positive Friendship Quality		Friendship Conflict		Social Phobia	
	<u>B</u>	$\Delta R^2$	<u>B</u>	$\Delta R^2$	<u>B</u>	$\Delta R^2$	<u>B</u>	$\Delta R^2$	<u>B</u>	$\Delta R^2$
<u>Step 1</u>										
Sex	.12	.01	-.52	.10	-.60	.16	-.21	.02	-1.34	.04
<u>Step 2</u>										
Consulting	-.02	.03	-.00	.00	.02	.02	-.01	.01	.05	.01

Table 6

*Regression of guiding on the outcome variables*

<u>Predictor</u>	<u>Outcome Variables</u>									
	Relational Aggression		Prosocial Behavior		Positive Friendship Quality		Friendship Conflict		Social Phobia	
	<u>B</u>	$\Delta R^2$	<u>B</u>	$\Delta R^2$	<u>B</u>	$\Delta R^2$	<u>B</u>	$\Delta R^2$	<u>B</u>	$\Delta R^2$
<u>Step 1</u>										
Sex	.12	.01	-.52	.10	-.60	.16	-.21	.02	-1.34	.04
<u>Step 2</u>										
Guiding	.01	.00	-.04	.03	-.02	.01	.01	.00	-.07	.01

Table 7

*Regression of prohibiting on the outcome variables*

<u>Predictor</u>	<u>Outcome Variables</u>									
	Relational Aggression		Prosocial Behavior		Positive Friendship Quality		Friendship Conflict		Social Phobia	
	<u>B</u>	$\Delta R^2$	<u>B</u>	$\Delta R^2$	<u>B</u>	$\Delta R^2$	<u>B</u>	$\Delta R^2$	<u>B</u>	$\Delta R^2$
<u>Step 1</u>										
Sex	.12	.01	-.52	.10	-.60	.16	-.21	.02	-1.34	.04
<u>Step 2</u>										
Prohibiting	.09	.02	.07	.01	.02	.00	.04	.00	-.67	.03