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Friendship Quality, Peer Group Affiliation, and Peer Antisocial Behavior as Moderators of the Link Between Negative Parenting and Adolescent Externalizing Behavior

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Abstract

Quality of peer relationships and perceived peer antisocial behavior were examined as moderators of the link between negative parenting and externalizing behavior problems in school from middle childhood to early adolescence. Data on negative parenting (i.e., unilateral parental decision making, low supervision and awareness, and harsh discipline) were collected from 362 parents in the summer preceding the adolescents' entry into Grade 6. Adolescent reports of positive peer relationships and peer antisocial behavior were assessed in the winter of Grade 7. The outcome measure was teacher report of adolescent externalizing behavior in the spring of Grade 7, controlling for externalizing behavior in Grade 5. High levels of friendship quality and peer group affiliation attenuated the association between unilateral parental decision making and adolescent externalizing behavior in school; this was particularly true when adolescents associated with peers perceived to be low in antisocial behavior. In addition, having low-quality peer relationships and having peers perceived to be highly antisocial further amplified the association between unilateral parental decision making and adolescent externalizing behavior problems. Finally, high levels of friend and peer group antisocial behavior exacerbated the predictiveness of harsh discipline for adolescents' externalizing behavior.

Parents serve an important socialization function in the lives of children and adolescents (Bugental & Goodnow, 1998). When parenting practices are neglectful, inconsistent, or harsh, child outcomes are often problematic. For instance, Steinberg, Lamborn, Darling, Mounts, and Dornbusch (1994) found that an authoritarian parenting style was associated with adolescents' having low levels of self-confidence and other internalizing problems. Rueter and Conger (1998) found negative, inconsistent parenting to be linked to poor adolescent problem solving. In a recent investigation, Pettit, Laird, Dodge, Bates, and Criss (2001) found low monitoring of youths' activities to be significantly associated with higher levels of adolescent delinquent

behavior. Thus, adolescents who are recipients of negative parenting are at elevated risk for a range of maladaptive behavioral outcomes. However, the risk is far from total—many with this risk are normally adjusted.

Protective Functions of Positive Peer Relationships

Sources of the apparent resilience of some at-risk adolescents include characteristics of the individual (e.g., good intellectual functioning), family (e.g., socioeconomic advantages), and extrafamilial environments (e.g., attending schools that promote academic excellence; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Masten et al., 1999). Recently, positive peer relationships have been identified as another possible protective factor for at-risk children and adolescents. In a longitudinal study of 138 families with teenagers, Gauze, Bukowski, Aquan-Assee, and Sippola (1996) found low cohesion and low adaptability in the family to be significantly associated with lower levels of adolescents' social competence and self-worth. However, this association was not significant among adolescents who had a high quality or reciprocated best friendship. Similarly, Bolger, Patterson, and Kupersmidt (1998) found that the association between child abuse and subsequent self-esteem was not significant among children who had high-quality friendships or a reciprocated best friend. Schwartz, Dodge, Pettit, Bates, and the Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group (2000) found, in two, independent samples, that living in a harsh family environment was associated with higher levels of subsequent peer victimization for children with few or no friends in elementary school, but this association was not significant for children with an extensive friendship network. Criss, Pettit, Bates, Dodge, and Lapp (2002) found that peer acceptance and the number of reciprocated friendships of children in kindergarten and first grade attenuated the link between family adversity and externalizing behavior problems in second grade. These studies provide evidence that friendships and the broader peer group can offset the risk implications of problematic family environments.

The interplay of peer and family influences may be especially salient during early adolescence for two primary reasons. First, as children enter adolescence, they spend increasingly more time with peers than in previous years (Larson & Richards, 1991). Second, the nature of peer relationships changes during adolescence (Berndt, 1996): There is an increase in intimate disclosure among friends (Berndt & Savin-Williams, 1993), and cliques become more defined (Crockett, Losoff, & Petersen, 1984). Thus, peer relationships may afford adolescents more opportunities for the mitigation of negative family experiences and may be more suitable for such purposes.

In the current longitudinal study, we first sought to investigate whether the link between negative parenting (i.e., unilateral parental decision making, low supervision and awareness, and harsh discipline) and adolescent externalizing behavior problems was moderated by two aspects of positive peer relationships: friendship quality (e.g., support, closeness) and affiliation with the peer group (e.g., sense of belonging). We chose to assess these two dimensions of peer relationships because of the theoretical and empirical distinction that has been made in the literature between relationships with individual peers (i.e., dyadic friendships) and the overall peer group (i.e., peer group affiliation; Asher, Parker, & Walker, 1996; Ladd, 1999; Parker & Asher, 1993). Specifically, there may be unique benefits inherent to these distinct, yet overlapping, relational domains (Asher et al., 1996; Brendgen, Vitaro, Doyle, Markiewicz, & Bukowski, 2002). We hypothesized that among adolescents with poor-quality friendships or low peer group affiliation, negative parenting would be positively and significantly associated with adolescent externalizing problems. However, we expected this association to be attenuated or nonsignificant among adolescents who have high-quality friendships or who are highly affiliated with their peer group.

Peer Relationships as Risk Factors

Although relationships with peers can serve positive functions for children, several investigators have argued that peer relationships can also have negative aspects (Abecassis, Hartup, Haselager, Scholte, & Van Lieshout, 2002; Hartup, 2001). In other words, peer relationships sometimes can lead to maladaptive outcomes (Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 1998). This appears to be particularly true in relationships with deviant peers. Indeed, several empirical investigations have found that associations with highly deviant and antisocial peers are related to various problematic outcomes during adolescence such as high levels of aggression (Capaldi, Dishion, Stoolmiller, & Yoerger, 2001), delinquency (Vitaro, Brendgen, & Tremblay, 2000), police arrests (Patterson, Dishion, & Yoerger, 2000), and other forms of antisocial behavior (Stoolmiller, 1994). Moreover, these links appear to be stronger for adolescents with especially close relationships with highly antisocial peers (Huey, Henggeler, Brondino, & Pickrel, 2000; Laird, Pettit, Dodge, & Bates, 1999; Morgan & Grube, 1991). Poulin, Dishion, and Haas (1999) found that 13- to 14-year-old delinquent boys who had low-quality friendships displayed greater increases in delinquent behavior 2 years later than did boys with high-quality friendships.

One mechanism through which deviant peers are thought to exert their negative influence is through “deviancy training” (Capaldi et al., 2001). That is, antisocial peers reinforce aggressive behavior. Furthermore, compared with others, high-antisocial children have more contentious and less satisfying peer relationships (Capaldi et al., 2001) that, in turn, operate as poor contexts for learning appropriate social skills (Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, 1992). Given these findings, it is not surprising that children’s interactions with deviant peers tend to exacerbate rather than alleviate problems associated with negative family relationships (Dishion, Capaldi, Spracklen, & Li, 1995; Dishion, Patterson, Stoolmiller, & Skinner, 1991; Frauenglass, Routh, Pantin, & Mason, 1997).

In the present study, we examined the role of peer antisocial behavior in two ways. First, we investigated whether adolescents’ perceptions of antisocial behavior exhibited by friends and by members of the peer group moderated the association between negative parenting and adolescent externalizing behavior. In accordance with the previous literature, we expected that this association would be stronger among adolescents with highly antisocial peers. Second, we examined whether the moderating role of positive peer relationships (i.e., friendship quality and peer group affiliation) was qualified by perceived peer antisocial behavior. In the present study, we postulated three possible ways perceived peer antisocial behavior could qualify the moderating role of positive peer relationships: (a) positive peer relationships will serve as buffers only when adolescents associate with peers who are low in antisocial behavior, (b) for adolescents with low friendship quality or low peer group affiliation, the detrimental effects of negative parenting will be exacerbated by associating with highly antisocial peers, and (c) peer characteristics will not alter the moderating role of peer relationships.

This study contributes incrementally to previous work on the moderating role of peer relationships by focusing on adolescence instead of childhood (Criss et al., 2002) and externalizing behavior rather than outcomes of peer victimization (Schwartz et al., 2000), self-esteem (Bolger et al., 1998), or social competence and self-worth (Gauze et al., 1996). In addition, we examined different domains of negative parenting, examined both dyadic and group-level peer relationships, considered characteristics of the peers when examining their potential buffering effects, and used multiple informants and longitudinal data.

METHOD

Participants

The 362 families in the current investigation were participants in an ongoing, multisite longitudinal study of socialization processes (see Dodge, Bates, & Pettit, 1990; Pettit et al., 2001). The participants were recruited when the children entered kindergarten in 1987 or 1988 at three sites: Knoxville and Nashville, Tennessee, and Bloomington, Indiana. Parents were approached at random during kindergarten preregistration and asked if they would participate in a longitudinal study of child development. About 15% of children at the targeted schools did not preregister. These participants were recruited on the first day of school or by letter or telephone. Of those asked, approximately 75% agreed to participate. The sample consisted of 585 families at the first assessment before kindergarten. Follow-up assessments were conducted annually through Grade 7.

The sample in the present study was composed of 362 adolescents (51% males, 83% European American, 15% African American, 2% other ethnic groups, mean Hollingshead SES = 39.41) who had valid teacher-reported externalizing behavior problem data in Grades 5 and 7 and parent-reported negative parenting data in Grade 6. Ongoing participants ($N = 362$) and those who did not have sufficient data for the present analyses ($N = 223$) were compared on sex, ethnicity, and kindergarten indicators of family socioeconomic status (SES), marital status, and mother-reported internalizing and externalizing behavioral problems. No significant differences were found.

Procedure and Measures

Parenting in Grade 6—Before adolescents' entry into Grade 6, their mothers completed a 90-min interview in their homes. In three cases, the mother did not have custody of the adolescent, and the interview was conducted with the adult (father or grandparent) serving as primary caregiver. A measure of unilateral parental decision making based on an instrument developed by Steinberg, Elmen, and Mounts (1989) was used to assess the degree to which the parent made decisions for the adolescent concerning daily activities (e.g., how to spend money, what to eat, which movies to see). Parents rated 16 items on a 4-point scale (1 = child decides, 2 = joint decision, 3 = discuss but parent has final say, 4 = parent decides). Items were averaged to create the final unilateral parental decision making score ($\alpha = .72$).¹

A measure of low supervision and awareness (Pettit, Bates, Dodge, & Meece, 1999) was created by averaging nine items ($\alpha = .71$) that were adapted from similar measures of parental monitoring (Brown, Mounts, Lamborn, & Steinberg, 1993; Capaldi & Patterson, 1989; Dishion et al., 1991). Each item was rated on a 5-point scale (ranging from 1 = *never or <5% of the time* to 5 = *almost always or > 95% of the time*; items were reverse-coded as appropriate). Mothers were asked to rate how often they know about where the adolescent is, who the adolescent is with, when the adolescent will return, the first and last names of friends, how difficult it is to know where the adolescent is or what the adolescent is doing, how often the adolescent goes to forbidden places, whether there are adults present when the adolescent is at friends' homes, if the adolescent associates with troubled peers, and if the adolescent communicates when going out alone (see Pettit et al., 1999, for details about scale construction;

¹Although we acknowledge that high levels of either unilateral parental decision making or unilateral teen decision making may be disadvantageous with respect to adolescent adjustment (Bugental & Goodnow, 1998; Steinberg et al., 1989), we focused on linear rather than curvilinear associations for two reasons. First, the scores from this sample ranged from joint decision making to unilateral parental decision making, with few parents endorsing unilateral teen decision making. Second, although several researchers have argued that there may be a shift in decision-making responsibility from parents to their teens by late adolescence (e.g., Paikoff & Brooks-Gunn, 1991; Smetana, 1988), we felt it would be unlikely for junior high students to make all or most of their decisions regarding their daily activities without consulting their parents.

in the present study, to be consistent with the other measures in having higher numbers mean more negative parenting, the scale was reverse-coded so higher numbers reflect lower supervision and awareness).

A scale reflecting harsh discipline was based on parent reports of how often the parents disciplined the adolescent by spanking, using a belt or paddle, or slapping or hitting. The three items were coded on a 4-point scale (1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = frequently) and were averaged ($\alpha = .71$) to create the final harsh discipline score.

Peer relationships in winter of Grade 7—During the winter when adolescents were in Grade 7, they were asked to participate in a structured, face-to-face interview at either their home or school. About 15% of the sample who had moved out of state since the study began were interviewed over the telephone. Adolescents were compensated \$15 for their participation.

A modified version of the Friendship Qualities Scale developed by Bukowski, Hoza, and Boivin (1994) was used to assess adolescents' perceptions of their friendship quality. Bukowski et al.'s original measure included five subscales reflecting companionship, conflict, help received, security received, and closeness in the relationship. Our adapted version also included items reflecting the help and security provided by the adolescent to his or her friend (see Laird et al., 1999). Each of 27 items (e.g., "If other kids were bothering me, my friend would help me" and "If I have a problem at school or at home, I can talk to my friend about it") was rated on a 3-point scale (0 = not true, 1 = somewhat or sometimes true, 2 = very or often true). After reverse scoring the conflict items, all items were averaged to create a scale of global friendship quality ($\alpha = .86$). A scale reflecting best friend antisocial behavior (Dishion et al., 1991) was created by averaging 5 items ($\alpha = .69$) that tapped the extent to which the adolescent reported that his or her best friend gets in trouble at school, gets into fights with other children, uses bad language, lies to adults, and likes to do things that make the adolescent scared or uncomfortable (coded as 0 = not true, 1 = somewhat or sometimes true, 2 = very or often true).

Next adolescents were asked whether they spent most of their free time at school (a) alone, (b) hanging out with a group of friends, or (c) alone with a best friend. Most (73%) adolescents reported hanging out with a group of friends and were subsequently asked a series of questions about this peer group. The measure of peer group affiliation was based on items described in Gavin and Furman (1989) and Brown and Lohr (1987) that were asked of the adolescents who reported spending most of their free time hanging out with a group of friends. Four items (i.e., "When my group does something together, others are sure to let me know," "I spend as much time as I can with my group," "I feel happiest when I am with members of my group," and "It is very important to me to be a member of my group") coded on 3-point scales with 0 = not true, 1 = somewhat or sometimes true, and 2 = very or often true were standardized and averaged ($\alpha = .67$) to create the peer group affiliation variable. Five items parallel to those asked regarding best friend antisocial behavior were asked in reference to the peer group. Adolescents rated on a 5-point scale (1 = never, 2 = once in a while, 3 = sometimes, 4 = fairly often, 5 = very often) how often their peer group engaged in the antisocial behaviors (e.g., "Members of my group get into fights with other kids"). Items were averaged to create a scale of adolescent-reported peer group antisocial behavior ($\alpha = .74$).

Adolescent behavioral adjustment in spring of Grades 5 and 7—In the spring of Grades 5 and 7 teachers provided information on adolescents' externalizing behavior at school. Because most children had multiple teachers, school personnel (usually the principal or school secretary) were asked to nominate the teacher most familiar with the adolescent (usually the physical education, language arts, or homeroom teacher) to complete this measure. Teachers were compensated \$5 for each child they rated. We controlled for the Grade 5 externalizing

behavior score in all analyses to control for continuity in externalizing behavior. At each time of measurement, the teacher rated 35 items from the Externalizing scale (e.g., whether the adolescent gets in fights and is disobedient at school) of the Teacher Report Form (Achenbach, 1991). For each item, teachers indicated whether the statement describing a particular behavior was not true (0), somewhat or sometimes true (1), or very or often true (2) of the adolescent. Items were summed to index adolescent externalizing behaviors. Raw scores were used in analyses, but for descriptive purposes, 15% of the sample scored in the clinical range (t score = 63 or greater) for teacher-reported externalizing behavior problems in Grade 7 (t score $M = 51.90$, $SD = 9.55$).

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics on all measures along with correlations among the measures are provided in Table 1. Correlations within and between variable domains generally displayed expected patterns of associations. Transformations to normalize the skewed distributions of some of our variables did not alter the pattern of any of the findings; thus, we report results using untransformed variables.

Overview and Analysis Plan

Through a series of multiple regressions, peer measures were tested as moderators of the association between negative parenting and adolescent externalizing behavior in school. In the context of these regressions, two-way interactions were examined to test the hypotheses that positive peer relationships and peer antisocial behavior would moderate the association between negative parenting and subsequent externalizing behavior problems in school. Three-way interactions were examined to assess whether the level of peer antisocial behavior qualified the moderating effects of positive peer relationships. Independent variables were centered before creating interaction terms. Significant interaction effects in these regressions were followed up with a method described by Jaccard, Turrissi, and Wan (1990). Specifically, to interpret two-way interactions, regression slopes depicting associations between the predictor and adolescent externalizing behaviors were examined at low ($-1 SD$) and high ($+1 SD$) levels of the moderator. A similar procedure was followed to interpret significant three-way interactions; the association between negative parenting and adolescent externalizing behavior was examined at high and low levels of positive peer relationship (i.e., friendship quality or peer group affiliation) and peer antisocial behavior (i.e., friend antisocial behavior or peer group antisocial behavior).²

Peer Relationships as Moderators of the Link Between Negative Parenting and Adolescent Externalizing Behaviors in School

Our main question was whether positive peer relationships or perceptions of peer antisocial behavior moderated the link between negative parenting and subsequent externalizing behavior problems in school. To examine this question, we conducted a series of hierarchical regressions, separately for the two peer relationship contexts and three parenting measures. To predict teacher-rated externalizing behavior in Grade 7, we entered into the regressions: (a) the main effect for Grade 5 externalizing behavior (Step 1); (b) the main effects for the negative parenting variable (unilateral parental decision making, low supervision and awareness, or harsh discipline) and peer relationship variables (friendship quality and friend antisocial behavior, or peer group affiliation and peer group antisocial behavior; Step 2); (c) the Negative Parenting

²The number of cases available for analyses varied by measure. Attrition analyses indicated no significant differences between the participants with ($n = 337$) and without ($n = 25$) friendship data on negative parenting variables or externalizing behavior in Grades 5 and 7. Moreover, the 262 teens who had data on peer group affiliation or peer group antisocial behavior did not significantly differ from those who did not have the data ($n = 99$). Multivariate analyses included only adolescents who had complete data on all of the variables in a given analysis.

× Positive Peer Relationship, Negative Parenting × Peer Antisocial Behavior, and Positive Peer Relationship × Peer Antisocial Behavior interaction terms (Step 3); and (d) the Negative Parenting × Positive Peer Relationship × Peer Antisocial Behavior interaction term (step 4). We first examined whether the three-way interaction (entered on Step 4) was a significant predictor of adolescent externalizing behavior after controlling for the relevant main effects and two-way interactions. Recall that we hypothesized two possible ways that perceptions of peer antisocial behavior could influence the moderating role of positive peer relationships: (a) high friendship quality or high peer group affiliation would attenuate the association between negative parenting and adolescent externalizing behavior only when the relationships were with low antisocial peers; or (b) among adolescents with low friendship quality or low peer group affiliation, having high antisocial peers would further amplify the association between negative parenting and adolescent externalizing behavior. If the three-way interaction was not significant, we turned to an examination of the two-way interactions (entered on Step 3) to assess whether positive peer relationships or peer antisocial behavior independently moderated the link between negative parenting and adolescent externalizing behavior in school. These results are summarized in Table 2.

Unilateral parental decision making—A significant Unilateral Parental Decision Making × Friendship Quality × Friend Antisocial Behavior interaction was found in the prediction of adolescent externalizing behavior. Inspection of the regression slopes (see top half of Figure 1) indicated support for the second postulated role of perceived peer antisocial behavior. Specifically, unilateral parental decision making was significantly associated with adolescent externalizing behavior, especially when adolescents had low-quality friendships with highly antisocial peers (slope = 13.03; $p < .001$). The association between unilateral parental decision making and externalizing behavior was attenuated when adolescents had high-quality friendships, regardless of the friends' level of antisocial behavior (slopes = 3.57 and 2.24; *ns* for high and low levels of friend antisocial behavior, respectively), or when adolescents had low antisocial friends, regardless of the quality of the relationship (slopes = 2.24 and -1.15; *ns* for high and low levels of friendship quality, respectively).

Turning to peer group affiliation, the results of the regressions indicated a significant Unilateral Parental Decision Making × Peer Group Affiliation × Peer Group Antisocial Behavior interaction (see Table 2). As indicated in the bottom half of Figure 1, evidence from the computed slopes again provides support for the second postulated role of perceived peer antisocial behavior. Namely, unilateral parental decision making was significantly and positively associated with subsequent adolescent externalizing behavior among adolescents with low levels of affiliation to their peer group, particularly when the peer group was highly antisocial (slope = 10.65; $p < .001$). Irrespective of the level of peer group antisocial behavior, high peer group affiliation attenuated the association between unilateral parental decision making and adolescent externalizing behavior (slopes = -1.32 and .87; *ns* for high and low levels of peer group antisocial behavior, respectively). Similarly, irrespective of the level of affiliation, affiliation with low antisocial peers attenuated the association between unilateral parental decision making and adolescent externalizing behavior problems in school (slopes = .87 and 4.83; *ns* for high and low levels of peer group affiliation, respectively).

Low supervision and awareness—As indicated in Table 2, the three-way interactions involving low supervision and awareness were not significant. After controlling for the main effects, peer group affiliation significantly interacted with low supervision and awareness. As shown in the top part of Figure 2, inspection of the slopes indicated that low supervision and awareness was significantly associated with adolescent externalizing behavior problems among those reporting low levels of peer group affiliation (slope = 7.48; $p < .001$); low supervision and awareness was not a significant predictor of externalizing behavior among adolescents reporting high levels of peer group affiliation (slope = 1.25; *ns*).

Harsh discipline—As with low supervision and awareness, the three-way interactions involving harsh discipline were not significant. Perceived friend antisocial behavior significantly interacted with harsh discipline after controlling for the main effects (see Table 2). As shown in the middle part of Figure 2, harsh discipline was significantly related to higher levels of adolescent externalizing behavior among those with highly antisocial friends (slope = 4.91; $p < .001$); this association was not significant among adolescents with relatively low antisocial friends (slope = 1.46; *ns*). The Harsh Discipline $\times$ Peer Group Antisocial Behavior interaction term was also significant after controlling for the main effects. Examination of the slopes (see bottom of Figure 2) indicated that harsh discipline was related to higher levels of externalizing problems for adolescents with high (slope = 5.23; $p < .001$) but not low antisocial peer groups (slope = .96; *ns*).

In summary, whereas low friendship quality and low peer group affiliation amplified the association between unilateral parental decision making and adolescent externalizing behavior in school, this was particularly true when the adolescents interacted with peers they perceived to be highly antisocial, providing support for the second postulated role of peer antisocial behavior in relation to the moderating role of positive peer relationships. In addition, peer group affiliation, regardless of the peers' level of antisocial behavior, served as a moderator in children experiencing low supervision and awareness. Finally, having friends and peer groups perceived to be low in antisocial behavior buffered adolescents against the effects of harsh discipline.³

DISCUSSION

The purpose of the present investigation was to examine peer relationships as moderators of the link between negative parenting and adolescents' subsequent externalizing behavior problems in school. These results advance knowledge in two main ways. First as expected, we found preliminary evidence suggesting that the link between negative parenting and adolescents' externalizing behaviors in Grade 7 beyond levels predicted by Grade 5 behaviors may be attenuated among adolescents with positive peer relationships and exacerbated among adolescents with antisocial peers. Second, and perhaps more important, having low-quality peer relationships and having peers perceived to be highly antisocial further amplified the association between unilateral parental decision making and externalizing behavior problems, controlling for prior externalizing problems.

Positive Peer Relationships as Buffers: Possible Mechanisms

In the present investigation, we found that friendship quality and peer group affiliation served as protective factors for adolescents exposed to unilateral parental decision making (effects further moderated by perceptions of peers' antisocial behavior) and that peer group affiliation served as a buffer for adolescents exposed to low supervision and awareness. An important theoretical question is: Through what mechanism might peer relationships protect adolescents exposed to negative parenting? One possibility lies in the provisions inherent to relationships with peers. Peer relationships may provide adolescents with opportunities for intimate disclosure, validation, support, and security (Furman & Robbins, 1985; Ladd, 1999), provisions that might be deficient or lacking in the parent–adolescent relationships. Some researchers have argued that peer relationships may serve as a context for remedial socialization

³We examined whether the moderating effects of peer variables functioned in similar ways for boys and girls by examining the three-way interactions (i.e., Negative Parenting $\times$ Peer Variable $\times$ Child Sex). There were three significant interactions and one marginally significant interaction. Examination of the slopes suggested that peer group affiliation served as a protective factor for girls but not for boys in relation to unilateral parental decision making. In addition, peer group affiliation served as a buffer for boys but not girls exposed to low supervision and awareness. Finally, friend antisocial behavior and peer antisocial behavior served as exacerbators in the link between unilateral parental decision making and externalizing behaviors for boys but not girls. Standardized betas and slopes from these analyses are available on request.

or the modification of early negative family experiences (Bolger et al., 1998; Cooper & Cooper, 1992; Criss et al., 2002; Price, 1996). In other words, when adolescents come from homes characterized by inadequate socialization experiences (e.g., insufficient learning of appropriate social skills), adolescents may be able to gain these experiences in the peer context. Indeed, peer relationships have been identified as a context for the development of self-esteem, social competence, and academic achievement (Hartup, 1996; Ladd, 1999).

We found stronger support for the moderating role of peer groups than for dyadic friendships. This finding is consistent with results reported by Criss et al. (2002) using data from the same sample at an earlier age, showing that classroom peer group acceptance, but not number of reciprocated friendships, moderated the association of ecological disadvantage and parents' marital conflict with children's externalizing behaviors in Grade 2. Perhaps the peer group provides a more salient nonfamilial context or the greater number of peers inherent in a peer group affords more opportunities for forming positive relationships outside the family than does a single dyadic friendship. These possibilities await further study.

Peer Antisocial Behavior

If the peer context serves as a domain for remedial socialization, do the personal attributes of the peers matter? Adolescents' perceptions of best friends' and peer groups' antisocial behavior moderated the link between harsh discipline and adolescents' externalizing behavior and influenced the moderating function of positive peer relationships in relation to unilateral parental decision making. Specifically, among adolescents with poor peer relationships (low-quality friendships or low affiliation to the broader peer group), unilateral parental decision making was significantly associated with subsequent externalizing behavior. However, this association was amplified when the adolescents perceived their peers to be highly antisocial. This effect suggests an additive risk for children not receiving appropriate socialization training characterized by negative parenting. First, having poor relationships with peers may limit the remedial social skill training that adolescents can experience in the peer context. Second, these adolescents are introduced to aggressive and antisocial means of interacting with others, which tends to be reinforced in antisocial peer contexts (Dishion, 2000; Dishion, McCord, & Poulin, 1999). Thus, these adolescents are not getting "appropriate" social skill training in the family or peer context and are primarily exposed to deviant models of social interaction. It should not be surprising to find that these antisocial contexts amplify the behavioral problems of at-risk adolescents (Parker, Rubin, Price, & DeRosier, 1995).

What was surprising, however, was that high levels of positive peer relationships with peers perceived to be highly antisocial served as a protective factor among adolescents exposed to unilateral parental decision making and low supervision and awareness. This is consistent with findings for this sample reported by Criss et al. (2002), who found that friendships at ages 5 and 6 years served as protective factors for children exposed to early family adversity irrespective of the friends' level of aggression. However, these findings run counter to an earlier study in the same sample in which Laird et al. (1999) found that adolescents at ages 12 and 13 years who had high-quality relationships with highly antisocial friends displayed more antisocial behavior than did adolescents with poor-quality relationships with similar peers. However, the Laird et al. study did not evaluate peer relationship qualities as buffers against effects of negative parenting, and the outcomes measured were adolescent- and teacher-reported delinquency rather than externalizing behaviors more broadly. These new findings suggest that in the context of unilateral parental decision making, having a group of peers with whom to talk about problems may help adolescents avoid misbehaviors, even if they perceive the peers to be deviant.

Limitations, Caveats, and Directions for Future Research

Although many interactions among negative parenting, peer relationship, and peer antisocial behavior variables were significant, effect sizes were modest and not all of the hypothesized interactions were significant. Significant interactions accounted for as little as 1% of the variance in Grade 7 externalizing behaviors beyond main effects of earlier externalizing behaviors, negative parenting, and peer relationships. However, McClelland and Judd (1993) have argued that changes in variance as small as these that are accounted for by interaction terms may be practically and theoretically important. Consistent with our findings, most interaction effects reported in social science research account for between 1% and 3% of the variance in regression models (e.g., Chaplin, 1991). In addition, as McClelland and Judd stated, "Moderator effects are notoriously difficult to detect in nonexperimental field studies" (p. 377); therefore, the consistency we found across analyses is noteworthy. In addition, these were conservative tests because different two-way interactions were tested simultaneously within each regression model rather than in separate regressions.

An alternative explanation of the findings is that parenting behaviors moderate the association between peer relationships and adolescent externalizing behavior. Indeed, Patterson, Cohn, and Kao (1989) found that parental warmth attenuated the link between peer rejection and child behavior problems. However, in the current investigation, negative parenting was assessed in the summer before the adolescents' entry into Grade 6, and the peer variables were measure in the winter of Grade 7. We adopted this research design because we conceptualized the peer constructs as intervening variables that had the potential to alter the externalizing behavior trajectories of adolescents exposed to negative parenting (Criss et al, 2002; Kokko & Pulkkinen, 2000). Still, given the correlational nature of the study, caution is warranted in interpreting the peer relationship moderators in terms of actual peer influences.

Yet another possibility is that adolescent externalizing behavior elicits negative parenting and contributes to problems in peer relationships. To address this possibility, we controlled for Grade 5 externalizing behavior in the prediction of Grade 7 externalizing behavior. It is important to interpret our findings in light of this aspect of the design: We were predicting residualized change in behavior. That is, parenting and peer variables predicted to what degree adolescents' Grade 7 externalizing behavior problems in school are higher or lower than would have been expected on the basis of their Grade 5 externalizing behavior problems in school

In considering the implications of our findings, it is also important to bear in mind the measures we used. Our outcome measure was teacher-reported adolescent externalizing behavior problems. Other researchers have found that peer relationships moderate effects of family experiences on other aspects of adolescents' adjustment such as social competence (Gauze et al., 1996), self-esteem (Bolger et al., 1998), and peer victimization (Schwartz et al., 2000), but future research is needed to determine whether the moderating role of peer relationships (and the personal attributes of the peers) generalize to other adolescent adjustment domains. This is particularly important because "resilient" children may display heterogeneity in behavioral outcomes (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). That is, resilient children may show competence in some domains while experiencing problems in others.

The supervision and awareness measure used in the present study includes a selection of monitoring-related items that tap aspects of parental knowledge, parental solicitation, and adolescent disclosure. The use of such global measures has been common in the monitoring literature (e.g., Dishion et al., 1991; Patterson et al., 1992; Vazsonyi & Flannery, 1997). However, recently Stattin and Kerr (Kerr & Stattin, 2000; Stattin & Kerr, 2000) have argued that a distinction should be made between what parents know and how they find out, with special emphasis on the adolescent's involvement in the process of monitoring. In light of this new conceptualization, future research will benefit from a focus on how peer relationships

differentially moderate the effects of these different facets of the supervision and awareness construct.

Our study benefits from the use of multiple times of measurement and multiple reporters. Because each major construct in our analyses was assessed through reports of a different respondent, we avoided capitalizing on shared method variance associated with relying on a single source of information. Our measures of friendship quality, peer group affiliation, and peers' antisocial behavior, however, were all self-reported by adolescents. Although research has indicated that perceptions of other people are more strongly associated with adjustment than are actual behaviors or attitudes (see Berndt, 1996), future research would benefit from inclusion of the perspective of both adolescents and their peers in evaluating these relationships.

We found that adolescents' perceptions of peers' antisocial behavior played an important role in the ability of peer relationships to moderate the effects of unilateral parental decision making. Future research should include additional peer characteristics such as social competence and supportiveness that may affect peers' buffering potential. Likewise, it is possible that the moderating role of peer relationships and peer characteristics may be due to personal attributes of the adolescents themselves (Criss et al., 2002). For example, some adolescents who experienced negative parenting at home may be endowed with certain personality strengths (e.g., conscientiousness, agreeableness) that may endear them to peers and alter the trajectory of problematic behavior in school. It is important for future research to examine whether personal characteristics of adolescents account for the moderating role of peer relationships and peer behavior.

In addition, as is apparent from examination of the means, medians, and distributions of the parenting quality variables in this study, most of the adolescents experienced positive, not negative, parenting. When using self-report data, it is always possible that social desirability response biases skew individuals' reports. "Negative parenting" in this sample should be interpreted as relatively negative in relation to the parenting experienced by other participants in the sample. Future research using clinical samples or adolescents who have been abused or neglected would contribute to our understanding of the potential for positive peer relationships to buffer adolescents from more extreme forms of negative parenting.

Conclusions

Although adolescents who experience negative parenting are at risk for later adjustment problems, positive peer relationships may attenuate this link. Our findings suggest that for adolescents who have high-quality friendships and strong peer group affiliations with peers perceived to engage in few antisocial behaviors, the association between negative parenting and later externalizing behavior problems is minimized; the association between negative parenting and later externalizing behavior problems is heightened for adolescents who have low-quality relationships with peers perceived to be highly antisocial. These findings underscore the importance of simultaneously considering risk and protective factors within both family and peer contexts in understanding the development of adolescents' externalizing behavior problems.

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FIGURE 1.

Significant three-way Unilateral Parental Decision Making $\times$ Positive Peer Relationship $\times$ Peer Antisocial Behavior interactions predicting adolescent externalizing behavior in Grade 7, controlling for externalizing behavior in Grade 5.

FIGURE 2.

Significant two-way Negative Parenting $\times$ Peer Relationship interactions predicting adolescent externalizing behavior in Grade 7, controlling for externalizing behavior in Grade 5.

Bivariate Correlations and Descriptive Statistics

TABLE 1

	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	N	Median	M	SD
1. Unilateral parental decision making ^a	.05	.19***	-.13*	-.14*	-.03	.09	.10	.19***	-.12*	362	2.44	2.43	0.39
2. Low supervision and awareness ^a		.26***	-.17**	-.08	.29***	.25***	.26***	.33***	-.08	362	1.22	1.35	0.37
3. Harsh discipline ^a			-.19***	-.11	.11*	.17**	.20***	.30***	-.08	362	1.33	1.52	0.60
4. Friendship quality ^b				.43***	-.29***	-.28***	-.13*	-.08	.29***	337	1.74	1.71	0.22
5. Peer group affiliation ^b					-.19**	-.20**	-.02	-.09	.16**	263	0.15	0.01	0.56
6. Friend antisocial behavior ^b						.57***	.17**	.24***	-.12*	336	0.20	0.30	0.32
7. Peer group antisocial behavior ^b							.20***	.24***	-.07	337	1.75	1.84	0.68
8. Externalizing behavior ^c								.59***	-.21***	362	3.00	6.64	9.33
9. Externalizing behavior ^d									-.15**	362	2.00	6.98	10.03
10. Child gender										362	0.00	0.49	0.50

Note. Sample size for correlations ranges from 263 to 362. Child gender was coded as 0 = male, 1 = female.

^aSummer Grade 6.

^bWinter Grade 7.

^cSpring Grade 5.

^dSpring Grade 7.

*
p < .05;

**
p < .01;

p < .001.

TABLE 2

Regressions Examining Positive Peer Relationships and Peer Antisocial Behavior as Moderators of the Link Between Negative Parenting and Adolescent Externalizing Behaviors in Grade 7

Step Predictor	Friendship		Peer Group	
	B	ΔR^2	B	ΔR^2
1 Grade 5 externalizing behavior	0.64***	.35***	0.63***	.31***
2 Unilateral parental decision making ^a	4.51***	.05***	3.77**	.04***
Positive peer relationship ^b	2.72		-0.71	
Peer antisocial behavior ^b	5.26***		1.93*	
3 Parenting × Peer Relationship	-8.44	.03***	-8.98**	.06***
Parenting × Antisocial	12.57***		1.72	
Peer Relationship × Antisocial	6.26		-2.60*	
4 Parenting × Peer × Antisocial	-44.57**	.01*	-5.18*	.01*
		$F(8, 327) = 31.91$ ***		$F(8, 254) = 23.43$ ***
1 Grade 5 externalizing behavior	0.64***	.35***	0.63***	.31***
2 Low supervision and awareness ^a	4.37***	.04***	5.01***	.05***
Positive peer relationship ^b	2.14		-0.91	
Peer antisocial behavior ^b	3.64*		1.48	
3 Parenting × Peer Relationship	-3.15	.01	-5.52*	.04***
Parenting × Antisocial	5.70		3.18	
Peer Relationship × Antisocial	5.05		-2.12	
4 Parenting × Peer × Antisocial	7.47	.00	-5.43	.01
		$F(8, 327) = 27.05$ ***		$F(8, 254) = 22.15$ ***
1 Grade 5 externalizing behavior	0.64***	.35***	0.63***	.31***
2 Harsh discipline ^a	3.13***	.05***	3.53***	.06***
Positive peer relationship ^b	2.90		-0.72	
Peer antisocial behavior ^b	4.55**		1.59*	
3 Parenting × Peer Relationship	2.03	.01	1.25	.04**

Step Predictor	Friendship		Peer Group	
	B	ΔR^2	B	ΔR^2
Parenting $\times$ Antisocial	5.35 [*]		3.11 [*]	
Peer Relationship $\times$ Antisocial	9.84		-2.76 [*]	
4 Parenting $\times$ Peer $\times$ Antisocial	5.16	.00	3.88	.01
	$F(8, 327) = 28.92^{***}$		$F(8, 254) = 22.40^{***}$	

Note. B is the unstandardized beta.

^aSummer Grade 6.

^bWinter Grade 7.

* $p < .05$;

** $p < .01$;

*** $p < .001$.