



The parental bond, resistance to peer influence, and risky driving in adolescence



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ABSTRACT

The present study examined the relations between gender, the parental bond, resistance to peer influence, and risky driving. In particular, the mediating role of resistance to peer pressure in the relationship between parental bond and risky driving was examined. The moderating role of gender on these associations was also investigated. The sample comprised 322 adolescents (136 males and 186 females), aged from 16 to 20 years, who were living in northern Italy. Path analysis results showed that the maternal bond only indirectly influenced adolescents' risky driving, via resistance to peer influence. On the contrary, the paternal bond was neither directly nor indirectly associated with risky driving. All the paths were invariant across gender. The results of the present study suggest that the parental bond is not responsible for the widely reported link between parenting practices and adolescents' risky driving, per se. Rather, findings suggest that the mother–adolescent relationship shapes adolescents' ability to resist peer influence, which, in turn, influences adolescent risky driving. Results are also discussed on the basis of cultural differences.

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1. Introduction

It is widely recognised that adolescence is a critical period for the development of health risk behaviours.

Over the past 20 years scholars have shown that the quality of the adolescent–parent relationship (Baumrind, 1991; Broman, Reckase, & Freedman-Doan, 2006; DeVore & Ginsburg, 2005; Fromme, 2006) and peer influence (Chassin et al., 2004; Dielman, Butchart, & Shope, 1993; Simons-Morton, Lerner, & Singer, 2005) have a great impact on the development or prevention of adolescents' risky behaviours. However, few studies have examined the combined contribution of the parental bond and peer influence to health/risk behaviors (Taubman-Ben-Ari & Katz-Ben-Ami, 2012).

The present study sought to examine the relationships between gender, the parental bond, resistance to peer influence and risky driving during adolescence, by analysing whether resistance to peer influence mediates the effect of the parental bond on risky driving.

1.1. The parental bond and health–risk behaviours

The family, and particularly the relationship between adolescents and their parents, is one of the most vital social contexts for adolescent development. Based on the literature on parental qualities that are crucial to the healthy development of adolescents, scholars (Baumrind, 1971, 1991; Baumrind & Black, 1967; Maccoby & Martin, 1983) have isolated two basic

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components of parental socialisation, which relate to the dimensions of “responsiveness” (parental support) and “demandingness” (parental control). The first dimension is indicated by an assortment of affective, nurturing or companionate types of parental behaviour. The second parenting attribute is defined by a range of parental regulating and disciplinary behaviours that are intended to shape the child’s behaviour in a manner that is acceptable to the parent. Recent studies (Barber, 1996; Barber & Harmon, 2002; Steinberg, 1990) have shown the importance of distinguishing between parental psychological control, which includes parental intrusiveness, guilt induction and criticism, and behavioural control, which refers to the rules and restrictions that parents have for their adolescents. Behavioural control may also consist of monitoring which includes parental awareness of their adolescent’s activities. Behavioural control is supposed to facilitate adolescents’ development by providing them with necessary supervision and guidance (Pettit, Laird, Dodge, Bates, & Criss, 2001). Conversely high levels of psychological control are thought to inhibit adolescents’ psychological and emotional development through an excessive, intrusive, and manipulative use of control whereas in contrast low levels of psychological control and high autonomy granting allow adolescents to make choices about activities and behaviour, and encourage the development of independence fostering their psychosocial adjustment (Barber & Harmon, 2002).

The effectiveness of parental practices seems to depend on the nature of the parent-adolescent relationship (Kerr & Stattin, 2000). A supportive parent-child relationship is a significant predictor of adolescent adjustment (Galambos, Barker, & Almeida, 2003), diminishing their engagement in health-risk behaviours (Gray & Steinberg, 1999). A large body of theoretical and empirical studies has linked the adolescent-parent relationship to a wide variety of adolescent outcomes (Haggerty, Skinner, MacKenzie, & Catalano, 2007). Adolescents raised in families characterised by greater care and lower levels of psychological control consistently demonstrate more protective and fewer risk behaviours than those from households characterised by lower levels of care and higher levels of psychological control (Beck, Boyle, & Boekeloo, 2004; Cox, 2007; DeVore & Ginsburg, 2005; Patock-Peckham & Morgan-Lopez, 2006).

Empirical evidence relating specifically to driving has indicated that several aspects of parental practices can be critical factors in reducing teen risky driving (Ginsburg, Durbin, García-España, Kalicka, & Winston, 2009; Simons-Morton, Quimet, & Catalano, 2008). Behavioural control and parental monitoring can promote compliance with state laws and household rules (Simons-Morton, 2007). By supervising their teenager drivers, parents can provide their children support in cases of difficult driving situations and prevent or warn them about hazards (Mayhew, Simpson, & Pak, 2003; Simons-Morton & Quimet, 2006). Further, parents can play a direct significant role in their teen’s safety by controlling adolescent car access (Keating & Halpern-Felsher, 2008). Finally, parents can also monitor and restrict which friends may be invited into the car, so that they can better regulate with whom their adolescent is driving (Hartos, Eitel, & Simons-Morton, 2001). In sum, adolescents with high levels of parental monitoring and behavioural control are less likely to engage in risky driving and to report traffic violations and crashes compared to those with fewer restrictions and less monitoring (Hartos, Eitel, Haynie, & Simons-Morton, 2000; Hartos, Eitel, & Simons-Morton, 2002; Shope, Waller, Raghunathan, & Patil, 2001; Taubman-Ben-Ari & Katz-Ben-Ami, 2012).

Less is known about the direct influence of psychological control on risky driving. However, it is reasonable to suppose that parental psychological control can have an indirect effect on risky driving. Indeed parents can also influence their adolescent’s engagement in risky driving by encouraging their adolescents’ autonomy and independence (Taubman-Ben-Ari, 2011). Psychological autonomy-granting on the part of parents who have a trusting and warm relationship with their adolescent promotes the development of a responsible, competent individual (Nijhof & Engles, 2007) who is capable of both self-regulation and adjusting to new situations, even without constant parental supervision (Burt, Simons, & Simons, 2006).

Despite the direct influence of psychological control on risky driving is theoretically possible, when the role of parenting practices in risky driving is examined, studies are often limited to investigating the role of parental monitoring (Borawski, Ievers-Landis, Lovegreen, & Trapl, 2003). However, it would be useful to examine the direct and indirect effects, via resistance to peer influence, of psychological control on risky driving in adolescence.

1.2. The parental bond and resistance to peer influence

Scholars commonly refer to *peer influence* as being direct peer pressure, as well as other social processes with peers, which involve an influence from the peers to the adolescent (Arnett, 2007). It is not surprising that the peer group influences adolescents, given that they find spending time with peers particularly satisfying (Larson & Richards, 1991; Lashbrook, 2000). After all, as individuals move into adolescence they develop greater independence from their parents and their peer group become more relevant. The increased importance of peers leads adolescents to conform within their peer group and to adopt the styles, values, and interests of their friends, especially during middle adolescence (Brown, 2004). Hence, adolescence is a fundamental time for the self-concept to be shaped by others, particularly peers.

However, parental influence does not disappear altogether. During this developmental stage, peers do not replace parents who continue to play an influential role in adolescents’ lives (Guarnieri & Tani, 2011). In particular, when adolescents have close and involved relationships with their parents, they are less influenced by peers (Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986). Further, the tendency of peers to influence adolescent behaviours and attitudes is highest when adolescents perceive the relationships with their parents as negative or lacking in support and guidance (Savin-Williams & Berndt, 1990; Taubman-Ben-Ari & Katz-Ben-Ami, 2012). Finally, adolescent-parent relationships characterised by high parental care and low parental control encourage adolescents to be less susceptible to peer influence, particularly in the domain of unacceptable behaviours for adults (Mounts & Steinberg, 1995).

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