



Early adolescent temperament, parental monitoring, and substance use in Mexican-origin adolescents



D. Angus Clark ^{a,*}, M. Brent Donnellan ^b, Richard W. Robins ^c, Rand D. Conger ^c

^a Michigan State University, USA

^b Texas A & M University, USA

^c University of California, Davis, USA

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ABSTRACT

Previous studies suggest that temperamental dispositions are associated with substance use. However, most research supporting this association has relied on European American samples (Stautz & Cooper, 2013). We addressed this gap by evaluating the prospective relations between 5th grade temperament and 9th grade substance use in a longitudinal sample of Mexican-origin youth ($N = 674$). Effortful control and trait aggressiveness predicted 9th grade substance use, intentions, and expectations, even after controlling for 5th grade substance use. Additionally, we found an interaction between temperament and parental monitoring such that monitoring is a protective factor for early substance use primarily for youth with temperamental tendencies associated with risk for substance use (e.g., low effortful control and aggression). Results add to the growing literature demonstrating that early manifestations of self-control are related to consequential life outcomes.

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The abuse of tobacco, alcohol, and other substances has long-term negative consequences for both physical and mental health (Fergusson & Boden, 2008; Mathers, Toumbourou, Catalano, Williams, & Patton, 2006; Rooke, Norberg, Copeland, & Swift, 2013; Steinhausen, Eschmann, & Metzke, 2007). One seemingly robust predictor of problematic substance use is early experimentation and initiation (Flory, Lynam, Milich, Leukefeld, & Clayton, 2004; Georgiades & Boyle, 2007; Tucker, Ellickson, Orlando, Martino, & Klein, 2005). In light of these findings, there is increasing interest in identifying the dispositional and family/contextual variables that place youth at heightened risk for early substance use. The present investigation examines how well early emerging individual differences (i.e., temperament) and parental monitoring prospectively predict substance use behaviors, intentions, and expectancies in a longitudinal sample of early adolescent Mexican-origin (i.e. of Mexican ancestry) youth. This is an important population to study given recent demographic shifts in the population of the United States (U.S. Census, 2011), as well as data suggesting that “Hispanic” adolescents may be at greater risk for the use of certain substances than other groups (Eaton et al., 2008; Mercado-Crespo & Mbah, 2013).

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: clarkd46@msu.edu (D.A. Clark).

Temperament and substance use

Temperament refers to early emerging, “constitutionally based individual differences in reactivity and self-regulation” (Rothbart, 2011, p. 10). Reactivity is conceptualized in terms of affective and motivational responses to stimuli, and captures, for example, the tendency for some children to feel threatened in response to novel stimuli and others to feel intrigued. Self-regulation refers to individual differences in the top-down control of reactive processes, and goal setting and goal striving behaviors; it reflects the fact that children differ in the ability to control their appetitive impulses, as illustrated in delay of gratification tasks (e.g., Mischel & Ebbsen, 1970).

There are numerous approaches for classifying the myriad aspects of childhood temperament. One prominent model posits that childhood temperament can be partitioned into three broad dimensions: effortful control, negative affectivity, and surgency (Rothbart, 2011). Effortful control reflects an individual's ability to control their attention and impulses. This domain is conceptually similar to the adult personality dimensions of disinhibition (Clark & Watson, 2008; Tellegen & Waller, 2008) and conscientiousness (e.g., Kochanska & Knaack, 2003; Roberts, Lejuez, Krueger, Richards, & Hill, 2014). Negative affectivity captures an individual's tendency to experience fear, anger, and other types of psychological distress. It is conceptually similar to the adult dimensions of negative emotionality (Clark & Watson, 2008; Tellegen & Waller, 2008) and neuroticism (John, Soto, & Naumann, 2008). Last, surgency refers to an individual's tendency to experience positive emotions and approach potential rewards. It is conceptually similar to the adult dimensions of positive emotionality (Clark & Watson, 2008; Tellegen & Waller, 2008), and extraversion (John et al., 2008).

Traits related to effortful control, such as impulsivity, have the strongest and most robust connections with substance use (Creemers et al., 2010; Hartman, Hopfer, Corley, Hewitt, & Stallings, 2013; Kotov, Gamez, Schmidt, & Watson, 2010; Stautz & Cooper, 2013; Williams et al., 2010). In contrast, results for negative affectivity are more equivocal. Some studies have found that negative affectivity predicts increased substance use (e.g. Elkins, King, McGue, & Iacono, 2006; Hicks, Durbin, Blonigen, Iacono, & McGue, 2011; Willem et al., 2011), whereas other studies have not (e.g. Galera et al., 2010; Gunnarsson, Gustavsson, Tengstrom, Franck, & Fahlke, 2008; Willem, Bijttebier, Claes, & Uytterhaegen, 2012). There are even hints that negative affectivity can predict *decreased* substance use (Gunnarsson et al., 2008; Willem et al., 2012). Some of the inconsistencies might stem from the varying ways negative affectivity is conceptualized (Pardini, Lochman, & Wells, 2004) and measured (Colder, 2001). For instance, fear, anger, and hostility are all components of negative affectivity, but fear might protect against early substance use, whereas anger and hostility might increase risk (Pardini et al., 2004; Willem et al., 2012).

A related but somewhat more complex dispositional characteristic – aggressiveness – has also been linked to substance use (Flannery, Vazsonyi, & Rowe, 1996; Mercado-Crespo & Mbah, 2013; White, Brick, & Hansell, 1993). Aggressiveness can be thought of as an emergent behavioral tendency related to low levels of effortful control and high levels of surgency and negative affectivity (particularly the elements related to hostility and anger; Meehan, Panfilis, Cain, & Clarkin, 2013; Rathert, Fite, & Gaertner, 2011; Rothbart, Ahadi, & Hershey, 1994). Although some have posited reciprocal relations between aggressiveness and substance use, White et al. (1993) found support for a unidirectional relationship whereby aggressiveness was related to subsequent substance use, but not vice versa. Therefore, aggressiveness might be an especially important dispositional predictor of early substance use.

One concern with the current literature on temperament and substance use is that many of the existing studies lack ethnic diversity. Stautz and Cooper (2013) noted that the majority of studies reviewed in their meta-analysis consisted of predominantly Caucasian samples. Ethnicity moderated the relationship between impulsivity and substance use; however, the authors concluded that there was not enough ethnic variation to draw firm conclusions (Stautz & Cooper, 2013). Although Stautz and Cooper (2013) focused exclusively on alcohol use, their findings highlight the need to evaluate the relation between temperament and substance use in diverse populations. The current study helps address this gap by evaluating connections between temperament and substance use in a sample of Mexican-origin adolescents.

Parental monitoring and substance use

Substance use is a multiply determined outcome that is influenced by contextual, as well as dispositional, factors. A large literature suggests that family dynamics contribute to adolescent substance use, and that such processes may moderate the effects of dispositional variables (Wills & Dishion, 2004; Wills, Sandy, & Yaeger, 2000; Wills & Yaeger, 2003). One family factor consistently related to substance use is parental monitoring (Wills & Yaeger, 2003), or, “parenting behaviors involving attention to and tracking of the child's whereabouts, activities, and adaptations” (Dishion & McMahon, 1998, p. 61). Monitoring is considered a protective factor against substance use, and studies confirm that increased parental monitoring predicts less use, even in high-risk (Clark, Shamblen, Ringwalt, & Hanley, 2012; Farrell & Dintcheff, 2006; Warren, Wagstaff, Hecht, & Elek, 2008) and diverse (Yabiku et al., 2010) samples.

Despite the well-documented association between parental monitoring and adolescent substance use, the actual direction of the effect between these variables is controversial. Although it is typically assumed that parental monitoring reduces problem behaviors in adolescence, monitoring may also reflect the outcome of a reactive process whereby parents increase or decrease monitoring efforts in response to adolescent behaviors (Kerr & Stattin, 2003). Indeed, parents sometimes decrease their monitoring efforts when their adolescents engage in delinquency (Kerr & Stattin, 2003). Moreover, parental monitoring may serve a protective role only for youth who have dispositional tendencies toward substance use. That is, monitoring might decrease risk for youth who have temperamental traits associated with substance use (e.g., low effortful control, high

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