

## The Role of Parents in Young Adolescents' Competence With Peers: An Observational Study of Advice Giving and Intrusiveness

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Young adolescents who encounter difficulties with peers can consult with their parents to help solve these problems. In this context, this study examines the contribution of adolescents' disclosure, parental advice giving, and parental intrusiveness into adolescents' social and behavioral adjustment. Young adolescents ( $N = 93$ ; 49% girls; mean age = 12.9) and their parents took part in a problem-solving task in which adolescent disclosure, parental advice giving, and intrusiveness were observed. Several indicators of social and behavioral adjustment were measured concurrently and 1 year later by using adolescents' self-reports and teacher ratings. Results indicated that adolescent disclosure and advice giving were associated with adjustment, whereas intrusiveness was concurrently and longitudinally associated with maladjustment.

The structure and importance of peer relationships change during early adolescence (Brown & Larson, 2009). Compared to children, young adolescents have a wider friendship network (Claes & Poirier, 1994), spend more time with their peers (Larson & Richards, 1991), seek out peers for intimacy, support, and advice (Buhrmester, 1996), and are more influenced by their peers (Berndt, 1979; Steinberg & Monahan, 2007). As a result, difficulties with peers, such as conflict, rejection, or victimization, have

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a potentially stronger emotional impact during early adolescence as compared to other developmental periods (Bukowski, Brendgen, & Vitaro, 2007). When problems with peers inevitably occur, parents have an opportunity to teach their children how to resolve these problems and conflicts in socially acceptable ways. The extent to which children seek their parents' help to resolve problems and conflicts with peers may affect characteristics of children's peer network (e.g., number of friends they have and level of peer conflict) and their overall social adjustment (e.g., aggressive behavior, social competence, and prosocial behavior).

The present investigation considered the extent to which qualitative features of parents' assistance to their children during times of peer conflict influenced both characteristics of their children's peer network, as well as their children's overall adjustment, over a 1-year period during early adolescence. Parents who give their children advice on how to handle a conflict or a problem with their peers respect and support their young adolescent's need for autonomy. Such parents allow their young adolescent the flexibility to follow their advice or not. In contrast, when parents are overly intrusive and controlling in providing assistance to their children, adolescents' autonomy is restricted and undermined. Intrusive parents also provide poor models of conflict resolution. Considered was the extent to which parents' use of advice giving and intrusive-controlling assistance affects their young adolescents' friendship network size, frequency of peer conflict, aggression, social competence, and prosocial behaviors. In the following sections, the theoretical expectation is discussed as to why parental advice giving and intrusive managerial styles would affect characteristics of their children's peer relationships. Next, associations between parenting styles and children's behavioral adjustment are described. We conclude with a summary of the specific hypotheses evaluated.

### *Parental Management of Young Adolescent Peer Relationships*

Early adolescence represents an important developmental transition in the manner in which parents provide assistance with peer relationships. Increases in autonomy that begin during early adolescence mean that parents become increasingly reliant on the young adolescent as a source of information about social relationships. According to Kerr and Stattin (2000), adolescents regulate the level of parental awareness and knowledge of their peer relationships. That is, adolescents' willingness to disclose events occurring with peers has been found to be a primary source of parental knowledge of peer conflict and relations (e.g., Kerr & Stattin). To a large extent, parents can provide assistance and guidance only when they are

aware of problems their young adolescent may be having with friends or when parents see a need to prepare their adolescent for the possibility of experiencing particular difficulties with peers. Thus, adolescent disclosure is one avenue by which parents gain awareness of peer difficulties (e.g., McDowell & Parke, 2009), and parent motivation to socialize competence is another.

In addition to affecting parental awareness of peer conflict and problems, parental provision of assistance with peer relationships needs to be sensitive to young adolescents' increasing need for autonomy (Steinberg, 1990). Indeed, while young adolescents tend to consider peer relationships as being their sole purview, parents believe that early adolescence is still a developmental period in which they should intervene (Smetana & Asquith, 1994). Moreover, since parents are generally not present when their young adolescents encounter problems with peers, their parenting role is one of consultants with the focus on providing advice and promoting their children's autonomous ability to solve the problems (e.g., Parke & Bhavnagri, 1989). Thus, one way parents help their young adolescents find solutions to problems while still maintaining and supporting their need for autonomy is by engaging them in the problem-solving process. Such advice-giving parents attempt to understand the problem and provide some advice on how to handle it but allow their young adolescents to implement the solution independently.

In contrast, intrusive parents impose their own solutions on their children's peer problems and restrict adolescents' ability to resolve the conflict autonomously. Parental intrusiveness in peer-related issues shares many features with the concept of parental psychological control as described by Soenens and Vansteenkiste (2010). Intrusive parents invalidate their children's perspectives by constraining their children's spontaneous expression of thoughts and feelings. Perhaps most problematic for the young adolescents, intrusive parenting responses involve pressure to endorse parents' imposed solutions and a undermine children's autonomy.

Empirical research examining the potential benefits of advice giving and the negative consequences of intrusiveness on young adolescents' emerging social competence is scant. Regarding advice giving, its benefits for children's adjustment are somewhat mixed. Among preschool-aged children, parental advice giving has been found to facilitate their entry into a peer group and to promote skills that enhance their ability to form relationships with new playmates (Ladd & Golter, 1988; Russell & Finnie, 1990). In contrast, mothers' explicit advice giving predicted their preschooler's social competence but only when controlling for the frequency with which parents provided advice, suggesting that less socially competent

children may solicit more advice than do more competent children (Laird, Pettit, Mize, Brown & Lindsey, 1994). During the middle childhood and adolescent developmental periods, the impact of advice giving may be less positive (Ladd, 1992; Parke, Burks, Carson, Neville, & Boyum, 1994). In fact, parents may use advice giving during late childhood and adolescence to *compensate* for their children's lack of social competence. In such instances, parental advice giving may serve a more remedial function. Consistent with this notion, McDowell, Parke, and Wang (2003) and McDowell and Parke (2009) found that a higher quantity and quality of advice giving was related to lower levels of social competence among children in middle childhood. Similarly, Mounts (2004, 2011) reported that higher levels of parental advice giving and consultation were associated with more positive friendship quality, but advice giving also was related to lower levels of social skills among adolescents. Thus, the primary challenge with studies considering the impact of parental advice giving on children's social competence is the issue of direction of effects. Quite possibly, less socially competent children may experience more problems with peers and solicit more feedback from parents, thereby receiving more direction than do more socially competent children.

Regarding intrusiveness, most of this work has focused on the impact of psychological control, a form of intrusive parenting, during adolescence. In fact, psychological control has been extensively studied and associations with maladjustment across adolescence have repeatedly been found (e.g., Barber, 2002; Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2010). Less extensively studied is the impact of parental intrusiveness in the peer domain, since this parental behavior is likely to be interpreted by young adolescents as impinging on their autonomy. Indeed, adolescents who perceived their parents as intrusive in their peer relationships reported more deviant and less positive peer affiliations (Soenens, Vansteenkiste, Smits, Lowet, & Goossens, 2007).

Thus, the research examining the importance of parental advice giving and intrusiveness on characteristics of children's peer network and social adjustment more generally is fairly limited and inconclusive. Parental advice giving seems to be associated with less positive adjustment for children, perhaps because less socially competent children or children less skillful during peer exchanges are the ones who solicit help from parents most frequently. Developmental differences in the impact of advice giving on children's adjustment also may occur. During the preschool period, evidence is mixed as to whether parental advice giving promotes social competence. By middle childhood and early adolescence, though, such active reliance on parents for advice and assistance seems to reflect deficits in social competence and peer social skills. In contrast, a number of studies have

considered the impact of parental psychological control on adolescents' adjustment, but far fewer have considered parents' intrusive responses to adolescents' solicitation of advice about characteristics of their young adolescents' peer networks.

One critical limitation with previous research is the lack of attention to the timing of developmental transitions. Quite possibly, greater assistance from parents is needed when children transition from elementary school to middle school or junior high school. In other words, adolescents may need and solicit parental guidance with peer-related issues more after developmental transitions, and qualitative features of parents' responses may affect characteristics of the peer network and adolescents' social adjustment more generally.

### *The Present Study*

The current study extends prior research on parental management of young adolescents' peer relationships and social adjustment in several ways. First, we considered the independent effects of adolescent disclosure and aspects of parental consulting on peer issues that could promote (i.e., advice giving) or hinder (i.e., intrusiveness) young adolescents' social and behavioral adjustment simultaneously. In addition to providing a more complete portrayal of parental involvement at this age, such an approach isolates the unique effects of disclosure, advice giving, and intrusiveness on young adolescents' adjustment. Second, disclosure, advice giving, and intrusiveness were measured observationally by using a parent-child discussion task designed specifically to elicit disclosure from adolescents, as well as through parental counseling of young adolescents with regard to peer problems. Direct observations of parent-child interactions have previously been used in research on parental advice giving in childhood (McDowell et al., 2003, 2009), parental control (Holmbeck, Shapera, & Hommeyer, 2002), and other family management constructs (Yasui & Dishion, 2008). However, we are aware of no study in which observational methods were used to measure adolescent disclosure to parents. Third, we restricted our focus to the impact of disclosure, parental advice giving and parental intrusiveness immediately following the transition into junior high school (contemporaneous associations) and 1 year after the transition to junior high school (longitudinal associations). Finally, we considered the impact of disclosure, advice giving, and parental intrusiveness on both peer network characteristics (e.g., number of friends, conflicts with peers) and social adjustment (e.g., social competence, prosocial behavior, and aggression).

The goal of this study was twofold. First, more adolescent disclosure, more parental advice giving, and less intrusiveness were hypothesized to be associated with fewer conflicts with peers, a larger friendship group, more social competence, more prosocial behavior, and less aggressive behavior among young adolescents during young adolescents measured contemporaneously in seventh grade (i.e., their first year in junior high school). Second, we hypothesized that more adolescent disclosure, more parental advice giving, and less intrusiveness would predict declines in conflicts with peers and aggression, as well as increases in peer network size, social competence, and prosocial behavior from 7th grade to 8th grade.

## Method

### *Participants*

Participants were part of a longitudinal research project on adolescent social development involving 390 adolescents. Given limited financial resources, a subsample of approximately 100 participants were contacted and asked to complete a 1- to 1½-hour in-home assessment. Participants were randomly invited until approximately 100 families accepted. Approximately 60% of contacted families agreed to complete the home visit. The final subsample included 93 seventh graders (49% girls; mean age = 12.9 years) and their parents. Written parental consent was obtained for each student prior to participation. The families came from various socioeconomic status levels (family income ranged from \$10,000 to more than 60,000) and resided in a large suburb of the greater region of Montreal. Of the adolescents, 98% were White and Canadian-born; 60% lived with both biological parents, 12% with their mother only, and 1% with their father only; and 18% lived with one of their parents and a stepparent and 3% lived with other people.

Comparative analyses revealed that the subsample of participants did not differ from the rest of the sample with regard to demographic characteristics (adolescents' age, family income, and family structure) or social and behavioral adjustment (i.e., perceived social competence, prosocial behaviors, aggressive behaviors, number of friends, and conflict with best friend).

### *Study Design and Procedure*

For the larger study and the subsample used in this investigation, all adolescents completed questionnaires in their classrooms during the spring semester in Grade 7 and Grade 8. Teachers with whom the adolescents had the most contact also completed a questionnaire about the adolescents'

behavior. Teachers completed questionnaires within approximately 3 weeks of the adolescent reports. Questionnaires were administered by university-level research assistants during class time. Students answered the questionnaires individually, but research assistants were accessible to answer any questions. Relevant to the current study, adolescents and teachers completed questionnaires regarding their social and behavioral adjustment; the same questionnaires were completed at each point in time.

During the home assessment, parents and their adolescents completed a modified version of the family assessment task developed by Dishion and colleagues (Dishion & Kavanagh, 2003; Dishion, Nelson, & Kavanagh, 2003). One of the discussion topics in which parents and adolescents completed, and the only task relevant to the present study, concerned problems that children were experiencing with their peers. Prior to the discussion, adolescents completed a questionnaire developed by our research team. This questionnaire contained 18 items addressing a variety of problematic peer situations, like problems related to conflict (e.g., "Do you ever quarrel or argue with a friend?"), peer victimization (e.g., "Have you ever been victimized?"), and peer rejection (e.g., "Other young people don't want you to be part of their group"). Adolescents chose the problem that had bothered them the most during the previous month.

Before the discussion task began, the research assistant asked the adolescents to describe the problem identified in the questionnaire with their parents and asked the adolescent and parents to identify ways to resolve or improve the situation. The research assistant left the families alone to discuss the issue for 5 minutes. Importantly, each family was presented with a peer problem that was salient to that adolescent rather than a standard set of issues that may or may not have been relevant to the adolescent. The most frequently identified problems were related to conflict with a friend. The discussion was videotaped for later coding.

Later, all family discussions were coded based on the Iowa Family Interaction Rating Scales (Melby & Conger, 2001; Melby et al., 1989–1993). Similar codes have also been used by Criss et al. (2001) and McDowell et al. (2003). After reviewing the entire discussion, trained coders rated five codes on a 9-point scale. In families where the two parents took part in the discussion task, a single score was given for both parents. Analyses showed no score differences between the families where two parents participated in the discussion task and the families where only one parent participated, and the number of parents participating were controlled in all statistical analyses. As this variable was not significant in any of the regression analyses, the number of parents has been excluded from the analyses presented in the Results section.

Independent graduate and undergraduate student raters assigned scores. Coders for this study were trained to be in agreement within 1 point on a 9-point rating format for 80% of the ratings. The interobserver reliability was assessed based on 25% of the entire study sample. Interobserver reliability was based on the proportion of ratings for which the coders were in agreement within 1 point (reported in parentheses for each scale).

### Measures

*Parental advice giving.* This was defined as the extent to which the advice is appropriate for the problem discussed and the age of the adolescent. Two observational codes were used to measure advice giving. First, the quantity and quality of parent's ability to advise their adolescent about a problem in the adolescent's peer relationships was coded (reliability = 95%). A low score on the 9-point scale was assigned when no solution was offered by the parents or when the solutions were too difficult to apply for the young adolescent or were too vague or were inappropriate for the problem. A high score on the 9-point scale was assigned when two or more solutions were suggested by the parents that could be realized and concrete and were very appropriate to the age of the adolescent and to the problem. Second, parental *thought prompting*—defined as parental ability to help their children analyze the problem, find solutions, and evaluate the consequences of each solution—was coded (reliability = 89%). A low score on the 9-point scale was assigned when the parents did not help the adolescent to understand the problem, did not help the adolescent consider possible solutions, did not help the adolescent find solutions by him/herself, or did not ask any question that could help the adolescent analyze the problem. A high score was assigned when the parents used the adolescent's own ideas to offer advice, were good at asking questions that helped the adolescent consider new solutions and their consequences, or helped the adolescent link problems and solutions. These two items were significantly correlated ( $r = .70, p < .01$ ). A final score was computed by averaging across the two codes. As shown in Table 1, the mean advice-giving score was 5.14 ( $SD = 1.50$ ), indicating that parents were moderately good at providing advice and helping their adolescents solve the problem, but parents varied considerably.

*Parental intrusiveness* was based on a single item reflecting the parents' efforts to resolve the child's conflict situation themselves or to control their child's freedom of speech during the task (reliability = 95%). A low score on the 9-point scale was assigned when the parents were not intrusive, advised the child but let him or her choose his/her own way to

**Table 1.** Descriptive data and correlations among study constructs both within and across time

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1. Gender	1														
2. Family income	.07	1													
3. Disclosure	-.19	-.05	1												
4. Parental advice giving	-.09	.24*	.19+	1											
5. Parental intrusiveness	.08	-.05	-.23*	.02	1										
6. Social competence G7	.09	-.10	-.01	-.19+	-.04	1									
7. Social competence G8	.07	-.04	-.06	-.04	.13	.74**	1								
8. Prosocial behaviors G7	-.14	.00	.06	-.01	-.27*	.20+	.01	1							
9. Prosocial behaviors G8	-.27*	.19	.02	.19	-.33**	-.14	-.14	.37**	1						
10. Aggression G7	.40**	-.12	-.08	-.07	.20+	.16	.09	-.42**	-.29*	1					
11. Aggression G8	.19	-.07	-.09	.01	.02	-.02	.09	-.18	-.35**	.32**	1				
12. No. of friends G7	-.35**	.02	.05	-.03	-.21*	.12	.03	.12	.26*	-.15	-.09	1			
13. No. of friends G8	-.31**	.07	.25*	-.04	-.35**	.11	.16	.32**	.15	-.31**	.02	.44**	1		
14. Conflict best friend G7	-.05	.13	.01	-.21*	.09	.01	.01	-.01	.06	.21*	.21	.05	-.03	1	
15. Conflict best friend G8	-.08	.10	-.01	-.19	-.09	.09	.03	.05	.18	.02	-.07	.22*	.12	.42**	1
Mean	10.66	5.45	5.14	3.49	3.19	3.20	2.92	2.74	2.74	1.55	1.43	7.88	9.08	1.25	1.29
Standard deviation	3.00	1.50	1.50	2.25	0.64	0.54	0.88	0.92	0.86	0.86	0.72	2.40	1.50	0.54	0.54
Skewness	-1.19	0.00	-0.24	0.78	-0.98	-0.50	-0.11	0.09	1.52	1.24	-0.77	-1.32	2.65	2.97	2.97
Kurtosis	0.43	-0.17	-0.30	-0.52	0.63	-0.22	-0.42	-0.37	1.96	1.07	-0.83	0.52	6.99	6.99	9.62

Note. Gender was coded 1 for female and 2 for male. G = grade.

\*\* $p < .01$ . \* $p < .05$ .

solve the problem, did not try to get personally involved in the conflict, were open to other solutions, were not controlling, and left their child some space. A high score was assigned when the parents were highly intrusive, insisted in solving the problem themselves or insisted that their child solve the problem in their own way, interrupted the child frequently, answered for the child or did not allow the child a chance to develop his or her ideas, or assumed control of the conversation. The mean intrusiveness score was 3.49 ( $SD = 2.25$ ), indicating that parents were somewhat intrusive, but considerable variability existed.

*Adolescent disclosure* was derived from the observed discussion task. Two codes were used to measure disclosure. First, the level of comfort in talking with their parents about the problem they encountered with their peers was coded (reliability = 92%). A low score on the 9-point scale was assigned when the child refused to talk about the problem or seemed very uncomfortable in touching on this topic, was not looking at the parents face to face, or had a nervous laugh or nervous twitch. A high score was assigned when the child seemed to appreciate talking about the problem with the parents and was very comfortable in discussing it with them, was enthusiastic in sharing this moment with the parents, or seemed to have discussed this problem previously with the parents. Second, the amount of detail provided to parents about the situation was coded (reliability = 92%). A low score on the 9-point scale was assigned when the child spontaneously offered very few details about the problem, did not name the peers involved and provided very little information about them, or did not address at all his or her feelings and an appreciation of the situation. A high score on the 9-point scale was assigned when the child spontaneously supplied a lot of detailed information about the problem and the peers involved or openly discussed his or her feelings. The two codes were significantly correlated ( $r = .70, p < .01$ ), and a score was computed by averaging the two items. On average, disclosure was moderately characteristic of the adolescents ( $M = 5.45$ ), but considerable variability existed in how comfortable and easily adolescents disclosed ( $SD = 1.50$ ).

### *Social and Behavioral Adjustment*

*Perceived social competence.* This was measured by using the social acceptance subscale of the Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents (Harter, 1988). This subscale is comprised of five items, which are scored from 1 to 4, with higher scores reflecting a more positive self-image (e.g., "Some youths are often self-disappointed BUT other youths are quite satisfied with themselves"  for each participant, a perception of social competence

score was calculated by computing the mean of the five items (see Table 1). The internal consistency of this scale was acceptable (Grade 7:  $\alpha = .82$ ; Grade 8:  $\alpha = .67$ ).

*Prosocial behaviors.* These were measured by using a 4-item scale completed by the teacher. These items were derived from the Social Behavior Questionnaire (Tremblay et al., 1991): “Helps others,” “Shares and cooperates with others,” “Invites a lonely child to come and join the group” and “Tries to stop conflicts between children” and were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (almost always). For each participant, a mean score was computed for the 4 items (see Table 1). The internal consistency of this scale was adequate (Grade 7:  $\alpha = .82$ ; Grade 8:  $\alpha = .80$ ).

*Aggressive behaviors.* These were measured by using Dodge and Coie’s (1987) six-item Proactive/Reactive Aggression Scale and two other items (“Often fights with other kids” and “Irritable, gets angry easily”). The items were completed by the teacher and rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (almost always). For each participant, a mean score was calculated for the eight items (see Table 1). The scale showed excellent internal consistency (Grade 7:  $\alpha = .94$ ; Grade 8:  $\alpha = .95$ ).

*Number of friends.* Participants were asked to write down the names of up to 10 friends. No constraints were imposed regarding the context of these friendships (e.g., school, neighborhood, leisure activities). The number of friends was limited to 10 so as to be consistent with procedures used by other adolescent friendship-network researchers (Degirmencioglu, Urberg, Tolson, & Richard, 1998; Urberg, Degirmencioglu, Tolson, & Halliday-Scher, 1995). The number of friends listed by the participants was summed, and scores could range from 0 to 10 (see Table 1).

*Conflict with best friend.* Participants were asked to identify their very best friend and answer a series of questions specifically about their relationship. The conflict scale was a shorter version of the Parker and Asher (1993) scale and included only three items. All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (almost always). This is a sample item: “There is a lot of conflict between this friend and me” (Grade 7:  $\alpha = .90$ ; Grade 8:  $\alpha = .89$ ). Scores were created by averaging across the three items (see Table 1).

*Family income.* This, before taxes, was used as an indicator of the family economic situation. Parents responded to a single item (“Which of the following categories represents your total income before taxes over the last year?”) ranging from 1 (less than \$5,000) to 13 (\$60,000 or more). The median response represented approximately CAN\$55,000.

## Results

### *Overview of the Analytical Strategy*

First, descriptive analyses and correlational analyses were computed to verify the expected associations among the study constructs. Next, a series of multiple regression analyses were conducted concurrently and longitudinally to assess the unique contribution of adolescent disclosure and parent advice giving and intrusiveness on adolescents' social and behavioral adjustment indicators. Given the number of regression equations computed, results will be described separately for each adjustment indicator.

The first set of regression analyses examined the main effects of adolescent disclosure and parental advice giving and intrusiveness on adolescents' conflict with friends, the number of friends, prosocial behavior, social competence, and aggression contemporaneously and longitudinally by controlling for earlier levels of the predicted behavior. For instance, regarding the number of friends, Table 2 summarizes the results of the regression analyses examining contemporaneous associations among adolescent disclosure, parental advice giving, and parental intrusiveness on adolescents' friendship size. Table 3 describes the results of the analysis controlling for friendship size in Grades 7 and 8. For the contemporaneous analyses, family income and adolescent gender were entered in the first step of the equation, and the disclosure, advice-giving, and intrusiveness constructs were entered in the second. In the longitudinal analyses, earlier levels of the dependent variable measured in Grade 7 were entered in the first step of the equation with family income and adolescent gender, and the disclosure, advice-giving, and intrusiveness constructs were entered in the second step.

### *Descriptive Analyses*

The means, standard deviations, and normality of distribution (skewness and kurtosis) for all the study variables are listed in Table 1. Transformations were applied to all variables that did not meet the normal distribution criteria before proceeding with the analyses (i.e., conflict with best friend). Correlations among all the study variables also are listed in Table 1. Patterns of associations among the independent variables measured during the parent-adolescent discussion task were examined first. No statistically significant correlation was found between parental advice giving and intrusiveness, indicating that these variables were independent of each other. Adolescent disclosure was statistically significantly correlated with

**Table 2.** Multiple hierarchical regression analyses for the concurrent contribution of adolescent disclosure and parental advice giving and intrusiveness

Variables	Social competence		Prosocial behaviors		Aggression		Number of friends		Conflict with best friend	
	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	$\Delta^2$
Step 1		.02		.01		.18		.11		.02
Income	-.11		.01		-.14		.04		.21*	
Gender	.09		-.12		.41**		-.33**		-.09	
Step 2		.04		.10**		.05+		.04		.08+
Disclosure	.05		-.11		.08		-.08		.06	
Advice giving	-.20		.03		-.03		-.05		-.28*	
Intrusiveness	-.07		-.32**		.21*		-.21*		.13	

Note. \*\* $p < .01$ .  $p < .05$ .

intrusiveness ( $r = -.23$ ,  $p < .05$ ; see Table 1), indicating that adolescents disclosed less about the nature of their peer problem when parents were rated as more intrusive. A trend toward statistical significance emerged for disclosure and advice giving (see Table 1), suggesting that adolescents who disclosed more to parents were also somewhat more likely to receive parental advice on how to handle the situation.

Regarding the associations between disclosure, advice giving, intrusiveness, and the dependent variables, disclosure was statistically and significantly related only to the number of reported friends in Grade 8 ( $r = .25$ ; see Table 1), indicating that more observed disclosure in Grade 7 was associated with a larger self-reported friendship group in Grade 8. Likewise, parental advice giving was statistically and significantly correlated only with conflict with best friend in Grade 7 (see Table 1), suggesting that more advice giving was associated with less friendship conflict. In contrast, parental intrusiveness was significantly correlated with a number of adjustment indicators. First, parental intrusiveness was significantly and negatively correlated with prosocial behavior in Grades 7 and 8 (see Table 1), indicating that more intrusive parents also had children who were rated by teachers as less prosocial. Second, parental intrusiveness was negatively correlated with adolescents' reports of the number of friends at Grades 7 and 8 (see Table 1); parents observed to be more intrusive had adolescents who reported fewer friends both within and across time. Finally, a trend toward statistical significance emerged for the association between parental intrusiveness and teacher-rated aggression in Grade 7 (see Table 1); adolescents rated more aggressive also had parents who were observed to be somewhat intrusive during family discussions.

**Table 3.** Multiple hierarchical regression analyses for the longitudinal contribution of adolescent disclosure, parental advice giving, and intrusiveness

Variables	Social competence		Prosocial behaviors		Aggression		Number of friends		Conflict with best friend	
	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$
Step 1		.48**		.20**		.10*		.20**		.18**
Income	-.04		.15		-.05		.04		.04	
Gender	.03		-.24*		.10		-.19		-.07	
Grade 7 score	.69**		.31*		.27*		.35**		.41**	
Step 2		.01		.12*		.00		.16**		.02
Disclosure	.03		-.10		.00		.21*		-.02	
Advice giving	.05		.26*		.02		-.04		-.10	
Intrusiveness	.10		-.28*		-.04		-.32**		-.12	

Note. \*\* $p < .01$ . \* $p < .05$ .

One unique feature of the present investigation was the reliance on teacher reports for a number of the adjustment indicators. That is, at each grade, adolescents' self-reports were used to measure social competence, number of friends, and conflict with best friends, but teacher reports were used to measure prosocial and antisocial behavior. The teachers who reported on the young adolescents' behavior changed from year to year. Not surprisingly, the across-time correlations were much stronger for the Grade 7 and Grade 8 self-reported indicators (e.g., social competence:  $r = .74$ ,  $p < .01$ ) than the teacher-reported indicators (e.g., prosocial behavior:  $r = .37$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Adolescents' own self-reported number of friends and frequency of conflict with the best friend, though, were correlated much to the same degree as the across-teacher reports of behavioral adjustment. That is, the Grade 7 through Grade 8 bivariate correlations of adolescent-reported number of friends and frequency of conflict with best friends were .44 and .42, respectively, whereas the bivariate correlations of prosocial and aggressive behavior were .37 and .32, respectively. Thus, compared to perceived social competence, adolescents perceived much less stability in number of friends and conflict with best friends from Grade 7 through Grade 8. In addition, teachers reported relatively low to modest levels of stability in adolescents' prosocial and aggressive behavior over the same period.

Next, the associations of each independent and dependent variable with adolescent gender were examined. Gender was not statistically and significantly correlated with disclosure, parental advice giving, or intrusiveness; however, girls were rated as more prosocial at Grade 8, less aggressive in Grade 7, and reported having more friends at both points (see Table 1). Since gender was correlated with a number of the adjustment indicators, it was statistically controlled for in all analyses.

*Perceived social competence.* As shown in Tables 2 and 3, after controlling for family income and adolescent gender, adolescent disclosure and parental advice giving and intrusiveness did not explain significant portions of the variance in the adolescents' perceived social competence concurrently (see Table 2) or 1 year later (see Table 3). Adolescents' self-reports were used to measure social competence at both time points, and perceived social competence was highly stable from Grade 7 through Grade 8 ( $b = .69$ ,  $p < .01$ ; see Table 3), leaving little variance for parenting or disclosure to explain.

*Prosocial behavior.* After statistically controlling for the influence of family income and adolescent gender, parental intrusiveness was statistically and significantly associated with prosocial behavior concurrently ( $b = -.32$ ,  $p < .01$ ; see Table 2), indicating that adolescents whose parents

who were more intrusive during discussions of adolescents' problems with peers were rated by teachers as less prosocial. Neither adolescent disclosure nor parental advice giving were statistically significant. The amount of explained variance ( $R^2 = .10$ ) also was statistically significant (see Table 2).

Regarding the longitudinal analysis, in the first step of the equation, family income, gender, and prosocial behavior in Grade 7 were entered. The beta coefficients associated with both adolescent gender and earlier levels of prosocial behavior were statistically significant. Prosocial behavior was rated by different teachers at Grades 7 and 8, and adolescents whose teachers who rated them as more prosocial in Grade 7 also were rated as more prosocial in Grade 8 (see Table 3). In the second step, both parental advice giving and intrusiveness, but not adolescent disclosure, were significantly associated with change in prosocial behavior and explained statistically significant portions of the variance in Grade 8 prosocial behavior ( $R^2 = .12$ ). Whereas advice giving in Grade 7 predicted increases in teacher-rated prosocial behavior, parental intrusiveness predicted declines in this behavior (see Table 3).

*Aggressive behavior.* Regarding the contemporaneous analyses presented in Table 2, after statistically controlling for family income and gender, only observed parental intrusiveness explained significant portions of the variance associated with teacher-rated aggression. Specifically, higher levels of intrusiveness was associated with higher levels of teacher-rated aggression ( $b = .21, p < .05$ ). As shown in Table 3, adolescent disclosure and observed parental advice giving and intrusiveness did not predict changes in teacher-reported aggression from Grade 7 through Grade 8.

*Number of friends.* As summarized in Table 2, after controlling for family income and adolescent gender, again, only parental intrusiveness was associated with adolescents' reports of the number of friends in Grade 7. Specifically, parents observed to be more intrusive had adolescents who reported fewer friends in Grade 7. The longitudinal analysis (see Table 3) revealed a similar pattern. After controlling for the effects of family income, gender, and Grade 7 friendship group size, higher levels of parental intrusiveness predicted declines in friendship group size. Adolescent disclosure was positively associated with change in the number of friends, indicating that adolescents who were observed to be more open with parents during their discussion about their problems with peers in Grade 7 also evidenced increases in friendship size. Both the disclosure and intrusiveness constructs accounted for statistically significant portions of the variance in friendship size (see Table 3).

*Conflict with best friend.* First considering the contemporaneous associations, after controlling for family income and gender, only the beta

associated with parental advice giving was significantly related to adolescent-reported level of conflict with best friends (see Table 2). Parents observed to provide more advice to their adolescents during discussions about peer problems had adolescents who reported fewer conflicts with friends. This step of the equation explained marginally significant portions of the variance associated with conflict with best friends (8%; see Table 2). Regarding the longitudinal analyses, after controlling for income, gender, and earlier reports of conflicts with friends, no statistically significant effects of disclosure, advice giving, or intrusiveness were found.

## Discussion

Increases in children's desire for autonomy during early adolescence may lead to changes in the manner in which parents provide assistance with their young adolescents' peer issues. The transition from elementary school into middle or junior high school often means that parents may have less of a close relationship with their children's teachers (e.g., Eccles et al., 1993), and parents may become increasingly dependent on their children to gain information about their children's peer relationships (e.g., Kerr & Stattin, 2000). Theoretically, critical changes in the structure of parent-child interactions must occur if parents are to continue to maintain some involvement and influence in the lives of their young adolescent. First, parents must be aware of an issue before they can provide their adolescent with any assistance in how to resolve a problem (i.e., adolescent disclosure to parents). Second, parents must respond to their adolescent disclosure in ways that preserves their adolescent's increasing need for autonomy (Mashe, 2010).

In the present investigation, we considered both the extent to which adolescents disclosed information about their social relationships with peers and the quality of parents' feedback to their adolescents, either in the form of advice giving or intrusiveness. Adolescent disclosure about peer-related problems, and parents' use of advice giving rather than intrusive feedback, was expected to be related to better relationships with peers and more positive social adjustment within time and over a 1-year period from Grade 7 through Grade 8. This hypothesis runs contrary to the very limited body of work on this topic. That is, adolescents who experience more social and peer problems have been found to be most likely to seek assistance from parents (McDowell & Parke, 2009; McDowell et al., 2003). In other words, disclosure may be most likely among those young adolescents who are experiencing social adjustment problems. Although this is likely to hold true, we argued that during naturally occurring transition points, like the transition from elementary to middle school/junior high school,

adolescents' solicitation of feedback and assistance from parents may temporarily increase. Although we could not test this idea directly, consistent with this expectation we reasoned that the quality of parents' responses during this transition period may promote more competence rather than the reverse. The following sections discuss the results of the present investigation, first discussing findings related to the impact of adolescent disclosure on indices of adjustment and discussing the results regarding the impact of parental advice giving and intrusiveness. Finally, we consider the methodological implications of the findings and conclude with a description of the strengths, limitations, and future directions of this work.

### *Adolescent Disclosure: Associations With Parenting and Implications for Peer Relationships*

Limited support emerged for our expectation that disclosure would be associated with more positive adjustment. Instead, more adolescent disclosure was associated with less intrusive parenting and, to a lesser extent, more parental advice giving. Quite possibly, adolescents may be more willing to discuss issues with parents when parents respond in ways that preserve the adolescents' autonomy. Quite surprisingly, adolescent disclosure was not significantly correlated with social competence or prosocial behavior. Of the ten regression equations computed, the beta coefficient associated with disclosure was statistically significant in only one instance—namely, adolescents who were more open during peer-related discussions with parents also reported more friends 1 year later.

Several explanations exist for the lack of support for our expectations. First, we may be wrong in that disclosure may not be a critical component of adolescent adjustment. Alternatively, though, the nature of the interactional task may have artificially inflated the amount of disclosure observed. Adolescents were instructed to describe a current peer problem with their parents, and parents were asked to help their adolescents find solutions to the problem. The means and standard deviations indicated substantial variability in the disclosure measure and suggest that this task was good for generating discussion about the peer problem. However, the level of disclosure for some adolescents may be artificially high; in other words, the task may not have ecological validity in that the level of disclosure may not represent naturally occurring adolescent disclosure. Empirical studies rarely use observational methods to measure disclosure, and additional research is clearly needed that combines both observational and traditional self-reported measures of disclosure.

*Parental Advice Giving and Adolescent Social and Behavioral Adjustment*

Parental advice giving was expected to be positively associated with adolescent adjustment concurrently and longitudinally. In contrast to a growing number of empirical investigations which report negative effects of advice giving on adolescent adjustment (e.g., McDowell & Parke, 2009; McDowell et al., 2003), we reasoned that immediately following transition into middle school/junior high school, all children may experience some peer problems and benefit from parental advice. Some, albeit limited, support for our hypothesis emerged. Regarding concurrent associations, more advice giving was associated with fewer conflicts with best friends, and, in terms of longitudinal associations, more parental advice giving in Grade 7 predicted increases in prosocial behavior from Grade 7 through Grade 8. That is, adolescents who received better advice when discussing peer-related problems with parents were rated as more prosocial by teachers 1 year later.

Parents who direct and encourage prosocial behaviors and promote sympathy and empathy in resolving problems with others can facilitate the development of these behaviors in their adolescents (Carlo, Fabes, Laible, & Kupanoff, 1999; Grusec & Goodnow, 1994). Quite possibly, advice giving may be one mechanism by which parents promote and socialize prosocial behavior. Promoting prosocial behavior during this developmental transition may have important implications for later developmental periods: Prosocial behavior has been found to be associated with decreases in peer rejection (Bierman, Smoot, & Aumiller, 1993; Volling, MacKinnon-Lewis, Rabiner, & Baradaran, 1993) and preventing later criminality (Hämäläinen & Pulkkinen, 1995) and long-term unemployment (Kokko & Pulkkinen, 2000).

McDowell and colleagues (2003) argue that parental advice giving might be more important in preschool years and less central as children mature. Our findings are not inconsistent with this interpretation, because advice giving was significant in only two of the ten regression equations computed. Nonetheless, the longitudinal results support the idea that advice given by parents promotes adolescents' adoption by equate social behaviors 1 year later. However, as to whether parental advice giving evolves from a socialization model of parental influence on children's peer relationships in preschool years to a remediation model as the child grows older (Laird et al., 1994) remains unclear. Longitudinal studies covering these developmental periods are clearly needed.

*Parental Intrusiveness Undermines Positive Social Adjustment During Early Adolescence*

Parental intrusiveness was expected to hinder social and behavioral adjustment, since being intrusive and seeking control over peer relations might be seen by adolescents as impinging on their autonomy. As with previous research (Fuligni & Eccles, 1993; Mounts & Steinberg, 1995), our findings indicate that the children of parents who adopted intrusive strategies used prosocial behaviors less frequently and, more importantly, decreased their use of these behaviors 1 year later. Consistent with previous research showing that parental intrusiveness is linked to aggressive behaviors and defiance of parental norms (Barber & Harmon, 2002; Conger, Conger, & Scaramella, 1997), young adolescents whose parents were intrusive were rated by teachers as being more aggressive. Parental intrusiveness also was associated with a smaller group of friends and predicted decreases in the number of friends 1 year later.

Given that the transition from elementary to high school involves substantial changes in friendship networks (Chan & Poulin, 2007; Hardy, Bukowski, & Sippola, 2002), parental intrusiveness may harm young adolescents' abilities to form and maintain new friendships (e.g., Putallaz & Heflin, 1990). Since adolescents and parents often disagree upon whose jurisdiction peer relations fall, parents who exert control over how to manage peer relationships may cause their adolescents to differentiate themselves from their parents (e.g., Smetana, Metzger, Gettman, & Campione-Barr, 2006). Consistent with these explanations, our findings suggest that parental intrusiveness may actually be an obstacle to adolescents' quest for socially competent autonomy and adjustment with peers.

*Methodological Implications for Observationally Measuring Disclosure, Advice Giving, and Intrusiveness*

Adolescent disclosure and parental advice giving and intrusiveness were observed during a parent-child problem-solving task. Even though observational assessment of parenting behaviors may offer new insight compared to questionnaire measures, these findings must be interpreted with caution. Behaviors were coded within the context of a parent-child problem-solving task and provided information about the quality and intensity of disclosure, advice giving, and intrusiveness. However, as described previously, the ecological validity of the quality and quantity of discussion is unknown. In other words, adolescents and parents may be able to discuss peer-related issues, but these discussions may not occur during

daily interactions. Observations were conducted at the family's home in an attempt to maximize the ecological validity of the procedure (Dishion & Granic, 2003). Despite these limitations, significant associations with the adolescents' social and behavioral adjustment were found, suggesting that the procedures may have some important utility.

Increasing the number of available tools to measure adolescent disclosure and parenting responses is clearly needed. The current investigation provides an important illustration of how a videotaped problem-solving task centered on peer-related problems can be used to examine both adolescent disclosure and the qualitative features of parents' feedback on adjustment during early adolescence. The vast majority of reported evidence of disclosure and parenting relies on a single informant, often the adolescent, increasing the potential for inflated statistical associations due to shared method variance. Additional research that uses both self-report and observational methods is needed to create additional measures and procedures to characterize the nature and intensity of adolescent disclosure and parenting responses more accurately.

### *Strengths, Limitations, and Future Considerations*

The present study has several notable strengths and addressed a number of limitations with previous research. First, we considered the importance of adolescents' disclosure specific to peer problems on characteristics of their peer relationships (e.g., conflict with best friend) as well as overall indicators of adjustment (e.g., social competence, aggression). Second, we targeted a specific developmental period that may pose unique challenges for adolescents—namely, their first year of junior high school (i.e., Grade 7). Third, we used observational measures of adolescent disclosure and coded the extent to which adolescents *actually* disclosed information about their peer problems. Fourth, we used observational measures of parenting and rated qualitative components of parental advice giving and intrusive response's to adolescents' disclosure. Finally, we included both adolescent and teacher ratings of adjustment, thereby eliminating the shared method variance problem when the same reporter provides information on both the independent and the dependent variables.

Despite these strengths, this study is not without limitations. First, we were unable to examine dynamic reciprocal processes over time and instead could consider only the impact of parenting and adolescent disclosure on change in adolescents' adjustment from Grade 7 through Grade 8. Future studies considering the impact of adolescents' behaviors on the strategies subsequently used by their parents are clearly needed

(Crouter & Booth, 2003; Kerr, Stattin, & Pakalniskiene, 2008). With maturation, adolescents may be more affected by peers, which in turn may affect parenting practices. Second, we did not examine differences between the father's and mother's respective influence on their adolescent's resolution of peer-related problems, but instead considered the collective contribution of both parents when both parents participated. Third, in our assessment of the number of friends, reciprocity of friendship nominations was not controlled for (Newcomb & Bagwell, 1995) and the context of these friendships—school based or not—was not specified (Witkow & Fuligni, 2010). Finally, the sample is quite homogeneous, so the findings may not replicate among a more diverse sample or among adolescents experiencing severe peer problems (Brown & Mounts, 2007).

Despite these limitations, these results clearly demonstrate that parents continue to have a direct impact on their children's peer relationships during early adolescence by acting as consultants with regard to peer-related problems. When parental feedback is aimed at promoting young adolescents' autonomy, the impact of their feedback is likely to be positive. In contrast, parents who are overly intrusive during discussions about peer-related problems may model and socialize socially unacceptable styles of interacting, making their children poor choices for friends. Questions remain as to whether parents' responses to peer-related problems are directed toward preventing, remediating, or resolving conflicts in their adolescents' peer relationships. Further research is needed to enhance our understanding of dynamic, reciprocal family-peer links during adolescence.

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