2019-08-05

Co-parental Conflict and Maternal Gatekeeping: The Effects on Parental Media Monitoring Behaviors

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Honors Thesis

CO-PARENTAL CONFLICT AND MATERNAL GATEKEEPING:

THE EFFECTS ON PARENTAL MEDIA MONITORING BEHAVIORS

by
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Submitted to Brigham Young University in partial fulfillment
of graduation requirements for University Honors

School of Family Life
Brigham Young University
August 2019

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ABSTRACT

CO-PARENTAL CONFLICT AND MATERNAL GATEKEEPING:
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Within the last decade, there has been an onslaught of digital media among adolescents, the majority of whom are ill prepared to self-regulate and critically examine the messages they receive from the media. Unfortunately, parents are often unsure how to help, and may disagree on how to monitor the media in their home. This study was conducted on the influence of conflictual co-parenting behaviors on media monitoring style choice. The results indicated that parents who experience co-parental conflict and maternal gatekeeping may have a difficult time encouraging their children's autonomy through active and autonomy supportive media monitoring and are more likely to use restrictive controlling monitoring. Families with higher incomes tended to experience higher levels of media monitoring overall. They also suggested that as adolescents age, parents tend to monitor less. By continuing to fill this gap in the research, the results of this study will shed some light on the relationship between co-parenting and the influence it has on the effectiveness of media monitoring in the home.

Keywords: maternal gatekeeping, media conflict, media monitoring

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There were many people whose skills, knowledge, and feedback went in to making this paper what it is. Notably, my thesis committee: Dr. Walker, Dr. Holmes, and Dr. Butler, whose professionalism, academic knowledge, and patience (HUGE emphasis on patience!) made this possible.

Most importantly, my husband Jason, who was a constant source of peace and calm throughout this process, and my family, for their support and patience as they encouraged me to do hard things.

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Introduction

Over the last decade, digital media use has exploded among adolescents. The current trend among 10-20 year olds is not promising, with as little as 11% of pre-adolescents experiencing healthy versus habitual media use (Nikken, 2018). Recently, daily use for adolescents adds up to more than 7 ½ to 8 hours per day and holds steady at 9 hours during later adolescence (14-18 years old) (Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010).

Adolescents are often ill-prepared for this onslaught, and unfortunately, parents, found to be influential facilitators of media use in the home (Austin, 1997; Desmond, Singer, Singer, Calam, & Colimore, 1985; Padilla-Walker, Coyne, Memmott-Elison, 2019), are often in a similar predicament. Unsure of how to monitor their adolescent's media use, parents may struggle to agree with each other on a strategy, creating conflict in the co-parenting system and possibly influencing the eventual choice of monitoring style. However, there is a scarcity of literature when it comes to media monitoring and co-parental conflict, especially concerning specific types of conflict, such as maternal gatekeeping. This study will help to fill the gap in the research by shedding light on both the indirect and direct effects of co-parental behaviors on media monitoring, specifically by looking at co-parental media conflict and its influence on media monitoring.

Media Monitoring

Media monitoring, defined as the effort put in by parents to supervise and discuss their child's media use (Padilla-Walker, Coyne, Kroff, & Memmott-Ellison, 2018), includes the parent-child interactions about media, such as discussions or rule-making (Rasmussen, Coyne, Martins & Densley, 2018). In general, the aim of parental media monitoring is to decrease children's exposure to the media (in terms of time with negative

content) and to help children critically examine the content they do view (Padilla-Walker, 2016). However, this process takes place in different ways, and is dependent on the family system and the specific situation. To account for the inevitable differences among families and their monitoring needs, research has determined four types of monitoring, as shown in Figure 1 (Valkenburg et al., 2013). There are two types: active and restrictive, and two styles: controlling and autonomy supportive (Coyne, Padilla-Walker, & Stockdale, 2016; Valkenburg et al., 2013).

Active and restrictive monitoring have been circulating through the literature for decades now. Active media monitoring involves discussing the content of programs with children, either during or after viewing (Valkenberg, Kremar, Peeters, & Marseille, 1999), to promote prearming (Collier et al., 2016) and critical thinking about media (Austin, 1993; Collier et al., 2016; Padilla-Walker et al., 2019). This strategy has been found to reduce aggression, sexual behavior, and substance use (Collier et al., 2016), as well as to be an overall positive influence (Gentile et al., 2012; Festl & Gniewosz, 2018) on children's viewing, understanding, and imitation of media content (Lin & Atkin, 1989). An example of active monitoring might be a parent taking the time to discuss the real consequences of violence after the child plays a particularly violent video game, aiding the child in separating the game from reality.

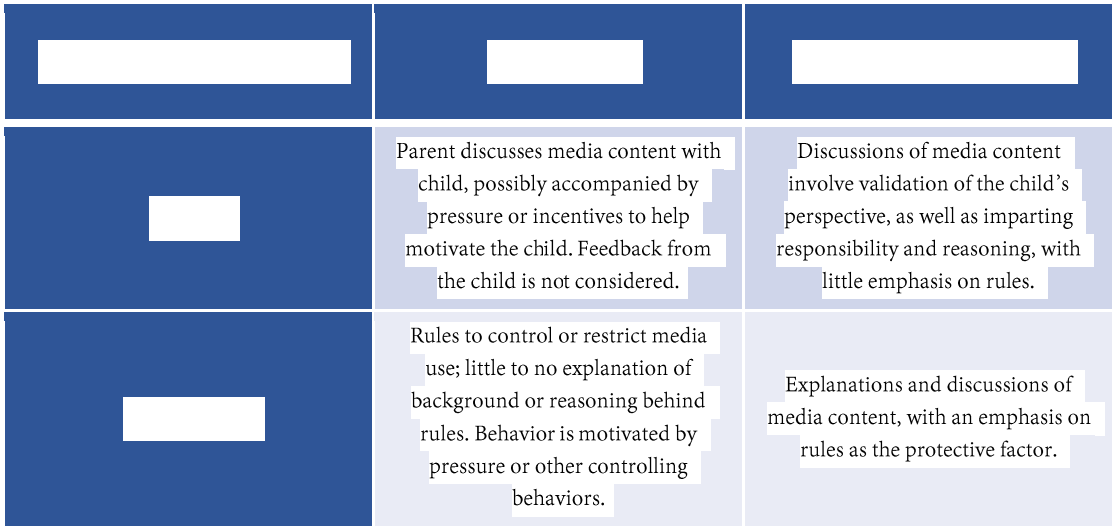
The second main style of monitoring, restrictive, involves parents making rules or prohibiting amounts or types of media use (Valkenberg et al., 1999). Examples of restrictive monitoring include limiting video game usage, or not allowing certain types of social media profiles. While research has found some positive outcomes of restrictive monitoring, such as lower levels of aggressive behavior and less exposure to violent

media (Gentile et al., 2012; Meeus et al., 2018; Nathanson, 1999), the results for restrictive monitoring are varied (Collier et al., 2016; Nathanson, 1999), especially for adolescents. This variance in results can be understood by drawing from Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which discusses different parenting strategies and their effects on a child's motivations, as well as their internalization of values (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

One of the basic tenets of SDT, internalization, is more strongly related to behavior than is compliance (a possible response to a more restrictive monitoring style) (Valkenburg et al., 2013). According to SDT, parents can encourage internalization as they teach and clarify to children their standards, thus promoting understanding and acceptance of the values behind the rules on the part of the children (Grusec & Goodnow, 1997), as well as autonomy. For this reason, active monitoring is considered to be the more effective monitoring style when it comes to adolescents (Padilla-Walker, 2016). On the other hand, if parents utilize control (in this case, restrictive monitoring) they may be less effective in monitoring and protecting against negative behaviors in adolescents, because doing so minimizes their need for autonomy.

To quantify the various monitoring styles, active and restrictive monitoring are further divided into controlling and autonomy supportive styles. These two styles are relatively new to the monitoring literature, with one of the first mentions taking place with the introduction of the Perceived Parental Media Mediation Scale (Valkenburg et al., 2013). This new scale proposed four new styles, each a combination of restrictive and active monitoring with controlling and autonomy supportive styles. (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Table of media monitoring styles.



The first style, controlling, includes intrusiveness (Cheung et al., 2016), dominance, and pressure (such as the use of rewards or threats) to modify and motivate adolescent behavior (Guay et al., 2018). When combined with the two main types, restrictive controlling monitoring and active controlling monitoring emerge. Restrictive controlling monitoring consists of rules to control or restrict media use along with little to no explanation of background or reasoning behind rules (Valkenburg et al., 2013), with the behavior motivated by pressure or other controlling behaviors. An example would be if a parent, without feedback from the child, does not allow the child to play a certain video game. On the other hand, active controlling monitoring takes place when a parent discusses media content with the child, possibly accompanied by pressure to help motivate the child (Valkenburg et al., 2013). Referring back to the previous example, the parent might have a discussion with their child about the content of the same video game, but behavior is enforced by pressure or other incentives.

The next style, autonomy supportive, is considered one of the better ways to monitor adolescent media use because of the attention to the autonomy of the adolescent

(Valkenburg et al., 2013). Restrictive autonomy supportive monitoring is similar to active controlling monitoring, but the parents discuss the rules with the child and allow the child's input, such as when a father sits with his daughter to discuss rules about social media and asks for her input. Finally, active autonomy supportive monitoring is characterized by a strong emphasis on the discussions of media content, all while making sure to validate the child's perspective. Using the same example, the father would put much less emphasis on the rules and instead monitor through discussion and input from the child.

As co-parents decide together the style they choose, they need to understand that their decision should reflect the situation and the child, as the style chosen has been found to be more influential than the frequency of monitoring (Valkenburg et al., 2013). That decision is affected by many factors, such as the co-parent's attitude towards media (Nikken & Schols, 2015) and the overall parenting style (Padilla-Walker, Coyne, & Collier, 2016) and goals, as well as other demographic factors such as household income (Nikken & Opree, 2018; Top, 2016) and education level. However, parents do not always agree on media monitoring strategies, which can lead to co-parental conflict, undermining the effectiveness of parental media monitoring.

Co-parental Media Conflict

Co-parenting, or the degree to which two individuals work as a team rearing a child (Baril, Crouter, & McHale, 2007), is important for the psychosocial development of children (Choi, Parra, & Jiang, 2019) and overall family functioning (Latham, Mark, & Oliver, 2018). This idea of the relationship between co-parents affecting overall parenting can be explained by Family Systems theory, which posits that the two members of the co-

parenting system can affect each other and their families by their actions and decisions. This is further supported by the spillover hypothesis (Erel & Burman, 1995), which postulates that parents may have difficulty compartmentalizing their spousal and parenting roles, thus allowing conflict to "spill over" into their parenting.

If co-parents cooperate well, their relationship can be a protective factor for children, with benefits such as lower probability of future behavioral problems (Choi et al., 2019; Parkes et al., 2019). With the addition of paternal sensitivity, cooperative co-parenting can also predict higher levels of behavioral regulation in children (Baptista, Sousa, Soares, & Martins, 2018; Gentile et al., 2004). However, if the co-parental relationship is conflictual, the side effects could include increased adolescent antisocial behavior (Baril, 2007), increased exposure to violent media content (Mares, Stephenson, Martins & Nathanson, 2018), and other negative behaviors (Fikkers, Piotrowski, & Valkenburg, 2017; Stevenson et al., 2014; Tavassolie et al., 2016).

There are many reasons why parents experience conflict. One possibility could be the deterioration of the sense of security and self-esteem that comes when a co-parent perceives themselves as dissimilar from the other co-parent (as it would be in a case of different monitoring styles) (Tavassolie et al., 2016). This sense of dissimilarity could result in higher levels of co-parental media conflict, leading to other issues (Parkes et al., 2019). Other causes of co-parental conflict over media include the time spent on and content of the media (Coyne, Busby, Bushman, Gentile, Ridge, & Stockdale, 2012), as well as the overall family climate (Festl & Gniewosz, 2018), different levels of media literacy (Hertlein, 2012), higher levels of child-parent media guidance (Nelissen & Van de Bulck, 2018), and differing overall parenting styles (Tavassolie et al., 2016).

Tavassolie et al. (2016) also found different levels of media permissiveness in a co-parenting system to be a major predictor of co-parenting conflict (Parkes et al., 2019), possibly leading to maternal gatekeeping (Zemp, Johnson, & Bodenmann, 2018).

Maternal Gatekeeping

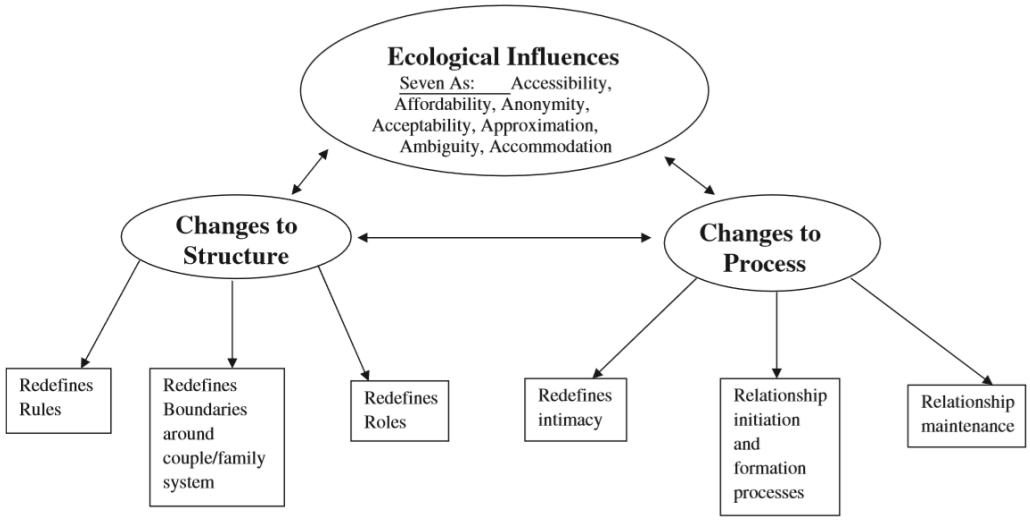
There is little research on co-parenting and maternal gatekeeping, and little to no research on gatekeeping and the media (Holmes et al., 2013), but this study could benefit from a general overview of the concept. Maternal gatekeeping, defined as "beliefs and behaviors that may serve to discourage (gate close) or encourage (gate open) father involvement in childrearing" (Altenburger, Schoppe-Sullivan, & Kamp Dush, 2018), has usually been studied in the context of paternal involvement (De Luccie, 1995), possibly because mothers have been found to have a powerful influence on paternal behavior (Altenburger et al., 2018; Schoppe-Sullivan, Brown, Cannon, Mangelsdorf, & Sokolowski, 2008). Referring back to Tavassolie et al. (2016) and their results concerning a difference in media permissiveness between co-parents, maternal gatekeeping in the context of father involvement makes sense. If a mother perceives her monitoring style to be similar to that of her partner, there is less likely to be conflict between co-parents, and therefore lower levels of gate-closing. However, the opposite could also be true, with dissimilar monitoring styles predicting more conflict, and potentially more maternal gatekeeping.

Moving on from paternal involvement, another significant contributor to maternal gate closing behaviors is maternal characteristics, which have been found to be a stronger predictor of gatekeeping behaviors than paternal behavior (Shoppe-Sullivan et al., 2008). Some of the more widely studied characteristics include maternal parenting expectations,

maternal psychological functioning (Holmes et al., 2013), and romantic relationship expectations. The combination of paternal involvement and maternal characteristics, among other things (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Pleck, 1983; Pruett, 1987; Stevenson et al., 2014; Tavassolie et al., 2016), can influence maternal gatekeeping levels. In the context of this study, co-parenting conflict could have a hand in gatekeeping levels, which in turn could influence overall parenting and possibly media monitoring styles.

Theoretically, this makes sense. Recently, Hertlein and Blumer (2012) published a new theoretical model, called the Couple and Family Technology (CFT) Framework (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Couple and Family Technology Framework: A multitheoretical model.



This model encompasses the effects of media technology on family structures and processes, using three different theoretical structures: systemic, ecological, and structural functional. Because of its multitheoretical perspective, it is well equipped to account for the complex relationships among conflict, gatekeeping, and media monitoring. For example, in this study, a shift from cooperative co-parenting to a conflictual relationship over media (a change in process) could encourage maternal gatekeeping behaviors (a

change in structure), which could then affect changes in the co-parents' media monitoring style choice.

Current Study

The purpose of the current study was to examine the influences of conflictual co-parenting relationship on the choice of media monitoring style (restrictive controlling, active controlling, restrictive autonomy supportive, and active autonomy supportive) using cross-sectional data from Project MEDIA. I hypothesized that maternal gatekeeping and co-parental conflict would be correlated with lower levels of active and autonomy supportive media monitoring. I then examined the influence of overall media conflict on the levels of restrictive controlling monitoring, hypothesizing that media conflict would be correlated with higher levels of restrictive controlling monitoring.

Method

Participants

The online survey was completed by 1,193 teens. The average age of participants was 15 years old (SD = 3.17). The gender ratio of the sample was 47.6% male participants and 52.4% female participants. The following is the breakdown of ethnicities contained in the sample: 68.6% of the sample identified as White, 13% Black, 10.7% Latino or Hispanic, 4.5% Asian American, .2% Native American, .4% Other, and 2.6% Biracial or Multiracial. The following is the breakdown of income levels contained in the sample: 37.2% of the participants reported a gross household income below $15,000, 26.7% reported a gross household income between $15,000, but under $50,000, 22% reported between $15,000, but under $100,000, and 14% reported a household income above $100,000 per year.

Procedure

Participants for this study were 10 to 20-year-olds in the United States. Participants were recruited using Qualtrics panels. Qualtrics was given quotas in terms of race/ethnicity, age, gender, and household income that matched U.S. Census data (age and gender were equally weighted) and contacted parents (when the participants were under 18) who were part of their existing panels and asked them to invite their children to participate. Participants aged 18 to 20 were contacted directly through existing Qualtrics panels. All participants provided consent and were compensated per Qualtrics standard compensation practices for panel members (this includes Amazon gift cards, iTune points, and travel rewards points. It does not include direct monetary compensation). The University IRB approved all procedures. Participants completed a brief 10-minute online survey regarding their media use, exposure, behavior, and their parents' behavior towards media.

Measures (Coyne, Padilla-Walker, & Stockdale, 2016)

Parental media conflict. To assess the amount of conflict between parents regarding children's media use, adolescents answered six questions on a Likert type scale from 1 *(never)* to 5 *(often).* Example items include "My parents don't trust each other's ability to make good media choices" and "My parents have fights about the type of TV/movies/ video games we should watch or play." Items were summed and higher scores indicated greater conflict regarding media for adolescents between parents. The scale displayed adequate reliability ($\alpha = .60$).

Maternal media gatekeeping. To access the degree to which mothers make the rules and regulations regarding media use in the home, adolescents were asked to report

on maternal media gatekeeping. Adolescents answered three questions developed for this study on a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Items were "If a choice has to be made about how much TV I watch or how much time I spend playing video games my mom thinks she is the one who should make that decision, not my dad", "If a choice has to be made about what kind of shows I watch or video games I play, my mom thinks she is the one who should make that decision, not my dad", and "If a choice has to be made about how often I use a cell phone/tablet, my mom thinks she's the one who should make that decision, not my dad." The scale displayed adequate reliability (α = .96). Items were summed and higher scores indicated greater maternal gatekeeping regarding the media.

Parental media monitoring. Parental media monitoring was assessed using a modified version of the Perceived Parental Media Mediation Scale (Valkenburg, Piotrowski, Hermanns. & de Leeuw, 2013). In this measure, adolescents are presented four main items: two restrictive and two active monitoring items. The restrictive main items measured adolescents' perceptions of how often their parents restrict their time spent with media and the content of the media adolescents use. For example, "How often do your parents tell you that you are not allowed to play video/computer games because they are meant for older kids." The active monitoring items measure adolescents' perceptions about how their parents explain media content and convey their attitudes and opinions regarding the media and media content. For example, "How often do your parents tell you that what you see in movies and commercials is different than real life?" Items are answered on a five-point Likert scale from 1 *(never)* to 5 *(very often).* Main

items are summed as a measure of overall restrictive (α = .83) versus active (α = .83) monitoring of adolescents' media use by parents.

Directly after each main item, adolescents were presented with follow-up items to identify *how* their parents actively or restrictively monitor their media use. Items were designed to assess if parents were attempting to control adolescents' media use and exposure or give information and support while encouraging adolescents' autonomy regarding media. Three controlling items were included in the measure. For example, after asking "How often do your parents tell you that you are not allowed to play video/computer games because they are meant for older kids." Adolescents were asked "And if your parents tell/would tell you this, how would they do this? They would…get angry if I still want to play those games." Adolescents answered on a five-point Likert scale from 1 *(not at all true)* to 5 *(completely true).* Adolescents' were asked four autonomy supporting follow-up questions. An example for autonomy supporting, after asking the same main question regarding playing video/computer games, was "explain to me why it is better to not play those games." Items were summed for controlling (α = .63) and autonomy supporting (α = .70) monitoring.

Demographics. Research suggests that certain types of parental media monitoring are functions of various demographic factors (Connell, Lauricella & Wartella, 2015; Nikken 2017). To account for this, I used the measures provided in the Project M.E.D.I.A. dataset (Coyne, Padilla-Walker, & Stockdale, 2016) for the household income, gender, and age variables.

Data Analyses

First, descriptive statistics were run to detect problems with missing data, of which there was an insignificant amount. I then ran correlations between all variables to determine potential direct relationships.

Results

There were several significant correlations among the main variables. Media conflict (see Table 1) was positively correlated with maternal media gatekeeping and active controlling monitoring, but was negatively correlated with restrictive autonomy-supportive and active autonomy-supportive monitoring styles. Media conflict was not correlated with restrictive controlling monitoring. Maternal gatekeeping was positively correlated with media conflict, as well as with all four monitoring styles.

Table 1. Direct correlations of variables contained in study.

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Household Income	--							
2. Age	-.637**	--						
3. Maternal Gatekeeping	.042	-.082**	--					
4. Media Conflict	-.167**	.177**	.259**	--				
5. Restrictive Controlling	.388**	-.520**	.147**	.035	--			
6. Active Controlling	.289**	-.342**	.202**	.072*	.524**	--		
7. Restrictive Autonomy Supportive	.430**	-.581**	.089**	-.091**	.908**	.518**	--	
8. Active Autonomy Supportive	.400**	-.467**	.086**	-.228**	.461**	.686**	.561**	--

*p < .05; **p < .01

For the demographic variables, household income was positively correlated with all four levels of media monitoring, suggesting that a higher family income could be associated with higher levels of media monitoring overall. Household income was also

negatively correlated with maternal gatekeeping and media conflict. Age was positively correlated with co-parental media conflict, and was negatively associated with all four types of monitoring.

Discussion

As levels of adolescent media use continue to rise, parents are often unsure how to monitor that media use, and can experience difficulty understanding and agreeing with each other on a specific strategy. To address this issue, this study examined the effects of conflictual co-parental behaviors on media monitoring style choice. I first hypothesized that there would be negative correlations between conflictual co-parenting behaviors and active controlling, active autonomy supportive, and restrictive autonomy supportive monitoring, after which I tested for a positive relationship between co-parental media conflict and restrictive controlling monitoring. The results of this study add to the current research by providing further evidence of the relationship between conflict and maternal gatekeeping, as well as provide a basic preview of the previously unexplored relationships between media conflict, maternal gatekeeping, and parental media monitoring.

Conflict and Gatekeeping

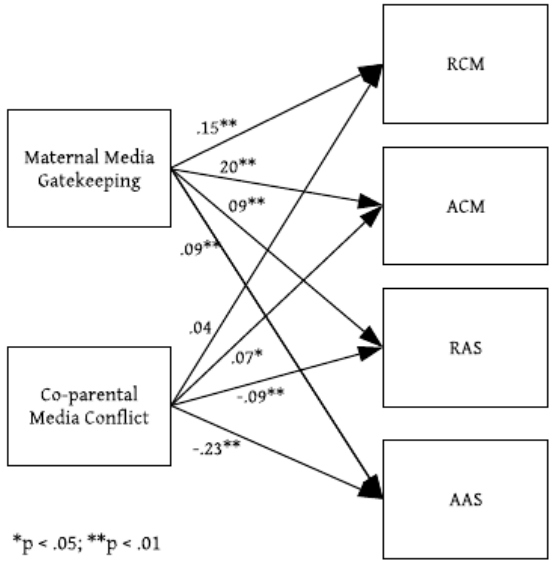
In this study, co-parental media conflict was positively correlated with maternal gatekeeping. Referring back to the CFT model, a shift from cooperative co-parenting to a conflictual relationship over media (a change in process) could encourage maternal gatekeeping behaviors (a change in structure). Shoppe-Sullivan et al. (2008) focused on the causes of gatekeeping, one of which was the mother's perception of her relationship with her partner. If the mother perceived the relationship to be unstable, she was more

likely to participate in gatekeeping (gate-closing) behaviors. As mentioned earlier, Tavassolie et al. (2016) also found that a difference between co-parents in media permissiveness was likely to precede conflict. Following the conflict, a mother may be less inclined to allow the father to have authority in the media processes in the home, thus creating an environment where maternal media gatekeeping is more likely to take place.

Conflictual Co-parenting and Media Monitoring

While the results concerning parental media monitoring did not completely support my hypotheses, there were several correlations that indicated significant relationships. Media conflict was not correlated with higher levels of restrictive controlling monitoring (see Figure 3), as was hypothesized.

Figure 3. Model of significant correlations between maternal media gatekeeping, co-parental media conflict, and perceived parental media monitoring.



A possible reason may be that because of their conflictual co-parental relationship over media, parents may have a difficult time being consistent (Tavassolie et al., 2016), fluctuating between controlling (e.g. rules and limitations) and active monitoring (e.g.

discussions of media content), instead of consistently relying on rules. This concept is further validated by the positive correlation between conflict and active controlling monitoring. Since active controlling monitoring is a mix of discussions and controlling behaviors, in the context of co-parental conflict, this style of monitoring could be seen as inconsistent. Concerning the negative correlation between conflict and the two autonomy supportive styles, this would fit with the idea that co-parental conflict is associated with less democratic parenting (Kitzmann, 2000; Krishnakumar & Beuhler, 2008).

However, contrary to conflict, maternal gatekeeping encouraged higher levels of monitoring overall, which did not support the hypothesis that gatekeeping would be correlated with lower levels of autonomy supportive monitoring. There could be many reasons for this, some of which include the factors mentioned earlier, like maternal psychological functioning (specifically control) (Holmes et al., 2013) and parenting perfectionism (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2008). Both of these characteristics have been studied in the context of maternal gatekeeping, and can have a significant impact on whether or not gatekeeping takes place. Holmes et al. (2013) studied the effects of maternal psychological control on gatekeeping attitudes and the adolescent relationship, and postulated that gatekeeping in the co-parental subsystem may be associated with other controlling behaviors in a mother's parenting. This fits well with the results of this study; if maternal gatekeeping is present, adolescents are more likely to report other controlling behaviors, such as more restrictive or controlling media monitoring, and less active and autonomy supportive monitoring.

Mothers tend to have higher standards for housework and child-raising than fathers (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2008), and in some cases, said standards can result in a

type of parenting perfectionism. Perfectionism could be considered another form of control, one that mothers have been "sociologically conditioned" to see as the ideal (Holmes et al., 2013). If maintaining those standards becomes a priority over the child's emotional needs, a mother is at risk of parenting perfectionism, as well as a higher risk for gatekeeping (Holmes et al., 2013; Lee et al., 2011).

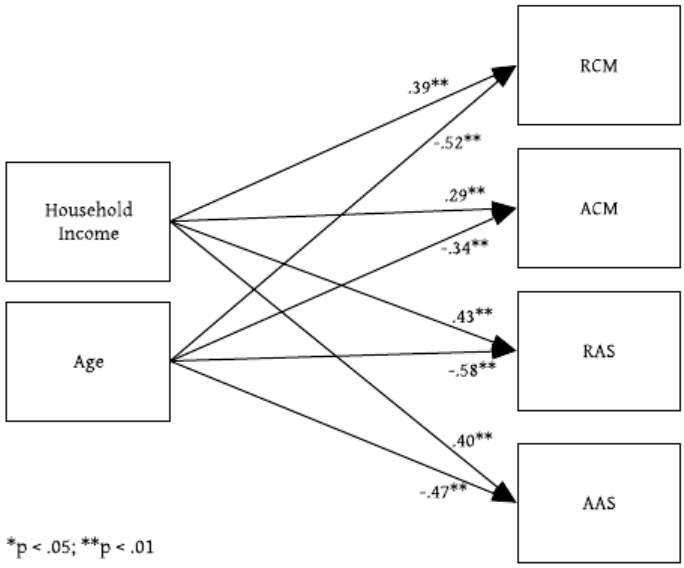
So, why would maternal gatekeeping and conflict affect media monitoring differently? One possible reason behind this variance may be a difference between the parental investments. For example, when maternal gatekeeping is taking place, the mother becomes more involved, and the father, as is characteristic of gatekeeping, becomes less so. According to the results of this study, maternal gatekeeping is correlated with higher levels of media monitoring, possibly because the mother may take the energy she had previously invested in the co-parental relationship and invest it in her children (Nichols, 2013). However, the levels of investment may differ when it comes to media conflict overall, with both parents withdrawing support and investment because they need to deal with the co-parental conflict first, resulting in lower levels of autonomy supportive monitoring (Kitzmann, 2000; Krishnakumar & Beuhler, 2008).

Age and Household Income

Finally, the demographic variables were very influential. Age was negatively correlated with maternal gatekeeping, as well as with every type of media monitoring. This is backed up by the current literature, as the majority find that higher ages predicted lower levels of media monitoring overall (Gentile et al., 2004), especially restrictive monitoring (see Figure 4) (Padilla-Walker & Coyne, 2011; Padilla-Walker, Coyne, Fraser, Dyer, & Yorgason, 2012; Top, 2016).

One reason for this could be the idea of deference, which refers to a parenting strategy where parents actively choose to do nothing in response to potentially conflicting values (Padilla-Walker & Coyne, 2011). Parents often use deference to show children their trust (Denham, 2000), and is more frequently used with older adolescents (Padilla-Walker et al., 2012; Daneels & Vanwynsberghe, 2017). This is due to the idea that the family rules are already understood, and that regulating the behavior would be unnecessary. Baril et al. (2007) also suggests that the relationship between adolescents and parents becomes more reciprocal as adolescents age, redefining the relationship on both sides and allowing for more independence (Daneels & Vanwynsberghe, 2017).

Figure 4. Model of significant correlations between demographic factors and parental behaviors.



The other prominent demographic variable was household income, which was positively correlated with monitoring overall (see Figure 4). Various studies have come to the same conclusion, with reasons like education, more resources, and higher levels of media literacy accounting for higher levels of monitoring (Austin, 1997; Vandewater, Park, Huang & Wartella, 2005). Interestingly, while lower income families seem to

monitor less, other studies have found that parents with lower income tend to utilize restrictive media monitoring more often than active monitoring (Domoff et al., 2017; Daneels & Vanwynsberghe, 2017), possibly because of the need to use media as a type of babysitter (Austin, 1997) while both parents work. Those higher levels of restrictive monitoring could also be connected to lower levels of media literacy, which is typically associated with lower income families (Daneels & Vanwynsberghe, 2017). Future research needs to take these factors into account, especially since the monitoring style used has the potential to significantly affect not only the co-parenting system, but also the family system as a whole.

Limitations

A possible limitation to this study is the fact that the dataset was obtained through child self-reports. Researchers have posed the question of whether or not adolescents are the best sources for reports of their parents' behavior, but studies have found that child self-reports were comparable to those of the parents (Nelissen & Van de Bulck, 2018; Cheung et al., 2016), demonstrating their validity (Gentile et al., 2012; Van de Bulck & Van den Bergh, 2000). Gentile et al. (2012) also found that, especially when it came to mothers, they often received reports describing a socially desirable parent, rather than what was actually taking place on a day-to-day basis (Pauli-Pott, 2008).

Another limitation is that this study is based on a cross sectional data set, so no long term conclusions should be drawn from this study. This is only a snapshot of what is happening on a daily basis in families, so there may be other variables involved that may not have been captured by this study.

Future Directions

This study provided a basic foundation for further research into the effects of conflictual co-parental behavior on monitoring styles. To ensure that this foundation is as solid as possible, this study should be replicated, with the addition of co-viewing, to take into account the effect of conflict and parental behaviors with all three established monitoring methods. With the addition of co-viewing (a more passive form of monitoring), researchers will be able to see if co-parental conflict over media encourages proactive (although potentially less democratic) monitoring, or passivity, which could possibly enable more gatekeeping behavior. Along those lines, since parents rarely only use one media monitoring style (Padilla-Walker et al., 2010), research should be done to look at the interaction of those styles, and whether or not monitoring styles are more effective when used exclusively or as a combination.

Continuing with the idea of consistently using one or more monitoring styles, another future direction for this research would be to include the parenting inconsistency measure from Project MEDIA. Further research can be done into the effects of conflict on the consistency of both overall parenting, and whether or not that consistency is related to the type of media monitoring style parents choose to utilize.

Considering the significance of age in the results, it might be advantageous to delve into deference, or the actions parents consciously choose not to take when it comes to parenting (Padilla-Walker & Coyne, 2011). This may help to reveal information concerning the relevance of the parental media monitoring of older adolescents, and the ideal age at which parents should introduce deference into the relationship with their child.

Finally, another possibility would be to study the effects of conflict and certain monitoring styles on the amount and type of media adolescents are exposed to. Media styles included would be television, video games, and social media, both violent and prosocial. Continuing with the idea that parental behavior can influence child outcomes, this study could aid parents and researchers in their understanding of the parent's role in their children's media use.

Conclusion

This study, conducted to understand the influence of conflictual co-parenting behavior on media monitoring efficacy and style choice, found that parents who experience co-parental conflict and maternal gatekeeping may have a difficult time encouraging their adolescent's autonomy through autonomy supportive media monitoring. Rather, they are more likely to resort to restrictive and controlling monitoring styles, which have been found to be damaging to an adolescent's development and autonomy. The results also suggested that as adolescents age, parents tend to decrease their monitoring levels. As a result of these findings, the hope is that parents and researchers alike will understand the importance and power of cooperative co-parenting, and be more aware of how co-parents are encouraging media to enter their home.

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