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Development Amidst Psychological Difficulties: Parents as Developmental Assets

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Development Amidst Psychological Difficulties: Parents as Developmental Assets

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Abstract

This study examined the association between positive youth development (PYD) and youth social and emotional difficulties, with a specific focus on the role of parental control as a developmental asset. We surveyed 141 youth (mean age= 15.15, %female= 47.5) and parent (mean age= 41.61, %female= 63.8) dyads and conducted hierarchical regression and moderation analyses. Youth with fewer difficulties had greater PYD, and greater levels of parental control were associated with greater PYD. In addition, an interaction effect highlighted the protective effect of parental control for PYD among youth with more peer problems. These findings demonstrate that parental control can be an important asset in supporting PYD and reducing the negative effect of some forms of youth social and emotional difficulties.

Keywords: *Positive Youth Development (PYD); Parental Control; Social and Emotional Problems; Behavior and Peer Problems; Hyperactivity*

Introduction

Positive youth development (PYD) is an approach to support youth development by emphasizing adolescents' strengths (Lerner et al., 2005; Shek et al., 2019). Given that adolescence is also a period of significant changes that make young people more susceptible to experiencing social and emotional difficulties (McQuade et al., 2021; Merikangas et al., 2010), it is important to identify developmental assets that can facilitate adolescent development (Benson et al., 2011). Individuals who are a part of a young person's ecology, such as parents, have been identified as the most effective contextual resource for promoting PYD (Lerner et al., 2019). As such, behaviors exhibited by parents, including biological or nonbiological guardians, hold significant importance in shaping youth development (Hancock Hoskins, 2014). However, the impact of parenting practices on the positive development of youth experiencing emotional and behavioral difficulties remains underexplored. Thus, the current study sought to examine whether a parenting strategy (parental control) could serve as a developmental asset to foster PYD among youth with different types of social, emotional, and behavioral difficulties.

Positive Youth Development

PYD is a developmental framework for adolescence that moves beyond the negative deficit view of youth toward a positive, strength-based view of youth development (Lerner et al., 2005; 2021) in which youth contribute to their contexts, and contexts support the development of youth (Ettetal et al., 2024). PYD has been operationalized in many different models and approaches (Dimitrova & Wiium, 2021; Lerner et al., 2021; Shek et al., 2019). In this study, we focus on the Five Cs model of PYD (Lerner et al., 2005), which focuses on developing the five interrelated Cs of competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring. Lerner and colleagues (2005) defined *competence* as one's actions in domain-specific areas including social, academic, cognitive, and vocational competencies. *Confidence* is defined as an internal sense of overall positive self-worth and self-efficacy; and *connection* refers to positive bonds with people and institutions that are reflected in bidirectional exchanges between persons and others. *Character* refers to one's sense of right and wrong, and integrity; and *caring* is defined as a sense of sympathy and empathy for others (Lerner et al., 2005). Lerner and colleagues (2022) updated their definition of character as a set of mutually beneficial person ↔ context relations that enables individuals to engage the social world as a moral agent. As evidenced in the large and growing body of literature using this framework, these five Cs are developed through, and promote, mutually beneficial relations between youth and their contexts, leading to the sixth C of positive *contribution* to self, family, community, and society (Bowers et al., 2010; Lerner, 2004; Shek et al., 2019).

Within the PYD framework, individual and contextual resources operate together to help youth thrive as they develop (Lerner, 2005; Gestsdóttir et al., 2017). When young people's strengths align with the available resources in their environment, known as developmental assets (Benson et al., 2011), it leads to PYD outcomes (Bowers et al., 2014; Taliaferro et al., 2020). Among the various contextual resources that can serve as developmental assets, relationships with caring adults are considered highly significant (Bowers et al., 2015). Typically, the first and most enduring developmental relationship in young people's lives is with their biological or nonbiological parents and guardians (Bowers et al., 2015), making these relationships the most vital developmental asset for PYD (Theokas & Lerner, 2006). Studies have shown that supportive parent-youth relationships promote positive developmental outcomes such as self-esteem (Gentina et al., 2018), and increased parental involvement has been associated with improved self-regulation (Bowers et al., 2011) and academic competence (Hill et al., 2004). Furthermore, it has been suggested that parental supervision might indirectly influence positive developmental outcomes by influencing the adolescent's perception of support (Melton & Deutsch, 2022). However, supervision is a multifaceted concept that has not been sufficiently researched in relation to PYD. For instance, even though some studies showed a link between parental knowledge about their child's whereabouts, activities, and friendships, and a reduction

in adolescent antisocial and delinquent behaviors (Kerr & Stattin, 2000), others indicated that excessive supervision could be associated with risky behaviors (Álvarez-García et al., 2019). In addition, adolescence is a period of increased autonomy (Harris-McKoy & Cui, 2013), and parental behaviors that involve supervision, such as parental control, restrict this autonomy. Finally, parenting behavior varies across parents and cultures and interrelates with the characteristics of youth (Deković et al., 1997, Roubinov & Boyce, 2017). Considering the variety of social, emotional, and behavioral difficulties that adolescents may experience, supervisory parenting behaviors may prove essential in helping youth navigate challenges such as conduct problems. Therefore, the present study sought to understand whether parental control can facilitate PYD in the face of such difficulties.

In particular, following the fundamental tenet of PYD that all youth have strengths (e.g., Lerner, et al., 2021), youth experiencing different types of social, emotional, and behavioral difficulties should also be capable of developing positively. As asserted in prior PYD research, such positive development relies on mutually beneficial relations between youth and their contexts (e.g., Bowers et al., 2010; Lerner, 2004; Shek et al., 2019). However, although PYD is widely associated with reduced delinquency and risk behavior (e.g., Lerner et al., 2005; Milot Travers & Mahalik, 2021), potential developmental assets that may support this pathway remain underexplored. Parents may serve as one such developmental asset, if they enact parenting strategies that support their teens in ways that both promote PYD and help youth navigate their particular psychosocial challenges.

Parental Control

Parental control has been defined as rules and restrictions that parents impose, which require youth to give them information about their daily life and plans (Kerr et al., 1999) and has long been deemed a fundamental aspect of parenting (Grolnick & Pomerantz, 2009). The role of parental control in adolescents' development, however, is not clear in both parenting practices and literature. In practice, parents need to renegotiate their roles when their children enter adolescence due to the increased need for independence and autonomy during this period of life, while still providing enough parental guidance and supervision (Harris-McKoy & Cui, 2013; Steinberg & Silk, 2002). This parental behavior can also be implemented or perceived differently depending on the child's age (Bowers et al., 2014) or gender, as girls are often believed to be better communicators and have closer relationships with their parents, whereas boys are often given more autonomy and independence (Bumpus et al., 2001; Keijsers et al., 2010). In the scientific literature, parental control is sometimes used interchangeably with parental monitoring (e.g., Brauer, 2017), and the defining characteristics of parental control have also changed from a focus on parents' pressure, intrusiveness, and domination in their adolescents' lives to the provision of parental guidance (Grolnick & Pomerantz, 2009). To avoid confusion, it is necessary to note that the present study refers to parental control as the supervision, structure, and guidance that parents provide with respect to adolescent autonomy (Grolnick & Pomerantz, 2009).

Parental control of this type is observed in diverse families globally, and is considered generally helpful to adolescents when coupled with warmth and support. Specifically, in both white and non-White families, parents' control and monitoring efforts are associated with better youth mental and behavioral health, especially when accompanied by high levels of autonomy support, low levels of psychological control, and low levels of conflict (Roche et al., 2019; Rodríguez-Meirinhos et al., 2020; Yabiku et al., 2010). For example, Harris-McKoy & Cui's (2013) research showed that even though youth in the United States (US) seek more autonomy during adolescence, lack of parental control positively impacts their delinquency into young adulthood, emphasizing the role of parental control and supervision through communication during adolescence to support positive youth development. These results are consistent with Brauer's (2017) research underscoring the importance of the positive impacts of parental control on US adolescents' self-control and delinquent behavior. However, it may also be possible to have too much parental control, as demonstrated by Harris-McKoy (2016), who found that both too much and too little parental control

were associated with delinquent behavior. Given that parental control has been shown to impact youth development and can lead to diverse psychosocial outcomes, further research is needed to explore the role of parental control on PYD. In particular, the effects of this parental behavior on youth development may depend on additional characteristics of the youth themselves, such as the level of social and emotional problems they may be experiencing.

Youth Difficulties

Adolescence is a period of significant changes, during which youth become more vulnerable to emotional and behavioral difficulties (Merikangas et al., 2010; McQuade et al., 2021). Many adolescents experience mild to moderate levels of anxiety, depression, and behavioral issues (Bertha & Balázs, 2013; Hankin, 2015; Krause et al., 2021). According to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH, 2021), around 20.1 percent of US adolescents ages twelve to seventeen experienced major depression (five million), with a noticeably higher prevalence among adolescent girls than boys. Conduct problems, such as aggression, defiance of rules, and disciplinary issues, also tend to increase in severity during this period (Trudeau et al., 2012). ADHD is another difficulty many adolescents suffer from, with is a significant public-health impact due to the lasting psychosocial challenges it poses for the affected individuals and their families (Gau et al., 2010). Additionally, adolescence is a time when young people rely on their peers for a sense of self-worth, belonging, and acceptance (La Greca et al., 2008). As such, being neglected or rejected by peers leads to high levels of stress, which in turn contributes to higher rates of psychological difficulties, internalized distress, and problem behaviors (La Greca et al., 2008; Moran & Eckenrode, 1991). The prevalence of these problems may vary across races within the US due to the social structure of the country, such as interpersonal and institutional racism that affect adolescents' experiences in their daily lives (Austin et al., 2022). Studies show that compared to non-Hispanic Whites, Hispanic and Black adolescents are disproportionately impacted by social, emotional, and behavioral problems (Assari et al., 2020; McLaughlin & Nolen-Hoeksema, 2007). Existing literature also underscores gender variations in trajectories of internalizing problems, as girls tend to report higher mean levels and more increases in internalizing problems compared to boys (Gutman & Codioli McMaster, 2020).

These social, emotional, and behavioral problems can significantly impact individuals' lives. According to Gresham et al. (2004), emotional and behavioral problems lead to both immediate and long-term difficulties in areas such as education, psychosocial well-being, interpersonal relationships, prosocial behavioral patterns, and vocational functioning. The challenges faced by individuals with conduct problems include poor academic performance, truancy, dropping out of school, and substance abuse (Angold & Costello, 2001; Furlong et al., 2004; Trudeau et al., 2012). Additionally, adolescents may be at risk of experiencing future difficulties such as engaging in antisocial behavior, criminal activity, family instability, and poor educational and health outcomes (Maughan & Rutter, 2001). At the same time, the negative sequelae of social and emotional difficulties in adolescence are preventable, and some youth even experience social and emotional well-being over the long-term despite difficulties in adolescence (Hale et al., 2015). Identifying assets that promote PYD across a wide spectrum of social and emotional problems is therefore especially important for supporting positive development for all youth.

The Present Study

Given the necessity of finding effective ways to support youth with social and emotional difficulties and the potential for parental control to support PYD, the present study explored the associations between youth difficulties, PYD, and parental control. In doing so, we sought to address two related research questions: First, are parental control and youth difficulties associated with PYD? Second, does parental control moderate the relationship between youth difficulties and PYD? Answering these questions will allow us to better understand positive development among youth with social and emotional difficulties and the role of parental control as an environmental asset to support these youth.

Method

The present study used data from a study of parent and adolescent recreation and psychosocial health during the COVID-19 pandemic. More information about the larger study can be found in Agans and colleagues (2024a).

Participants

Participants in the present study consisted of 141 parent-adolescent dyads. Youth participants included seventy-four males (52.5%) and sixty-seven females (47.5%) ages thirteen to eighteen ($M = 15.15$, $SD = 1.30$). Of the 141 youth, seventy-three (51.8%) self-identified as White, three (2.1%) as American Indian or Alaska Native, six (4.3%) as Asian or Asian American, seven (5%) as Black or African American, forty-two (29.8%) as Hispanic or Latino/Latina, and ten (7.1%) as multiracial. Parent participants included fifty biological fathers or male guardians (34.4%), ninety-one biological mothers or female guardians (63.8%), and one nonbinary parent (0.8%) ages thirty-two to fifty-nine ($M = 40.81$, $SD = 4.6$). Of the 141 parent participants, seventy-six (53.9%) self-identified as White, two (1.4%) as American Indian or Alaska Native, four (2.8%) as Asian or Asian American, seven (5%) as Black or African American, forty-four (31.2%) as Hispanic or Latino/Latina, and seven (5%) multiracial.

126 (89.4%) of the parent participants were married, four (2.8%) of them were single, six (4.3%) were divorced, three (2.1%) were living with a partner, and one (.7%) chose other for their relationship status. 132 (93.6%) participants stated that their current spouse or partner is their adolescent's biological parent or legal guardian. Regarding parental education, seventy-two (52%) had an associate's degree or less, forty-one (29%) had a four-year college degree, and twenty-six (19%) attended graduate or professional school after college.

Procedures

Recruitment took place from June 2021 to August 2021 through email and social media. Leaders of youth-serving organizations throughout the US were emailed and asked to inform the families they serve about the study. Moreover, posts targeting parents and adolescents within the US were shared on X and on Facebook through paid advertisements for two months. Advertisements on Facebook were shown to over 52,800 people, and 982 clicked on the link directing individuals to the study's website.

Individuals eighteen and older who volunteered to take part in the study provided informed consent and completed an eligibility survey. Participants who met the study's inclusion criteria (including being the parent of an adolescent child between the ages of thirteen and eighteen) received an automated link to the full study survey within seventy-two hours of completing the eligibility survey. During these seventy-two hours, responses to the eligibility survey were screened by the research team and ineligible participants were prevented from receiving the full study link. After completing the full survey (approximately twenty-five minutes), parents who had adolescent children under the age of eighteen were asked to consent to their child's participation. Then an automated email invitation was sent to the youth. Youth participants who were eighteen years old were able to take part in the survey without the need for parental consent. All data were screened to exclude fraudulent participants (see Agans et al., 2024b). Participants who were not screened out were compensated with a ten-dollar Amazon gift card.

Measures

Demographics (Youth Report)

Youth age was reported as an open-ended typed response to the question: "How old are you in years?" Participants were provided the following options when reporting their gender: male, female, transgender, nonbinary, questioning/not sure of gender identity, and something else fits better. To report their race/

ethnicity, participants were asked to select all that applied from the following options: White, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian or Asian American, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino/Latina, Middle Eastern or North African, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, Other, and Multiracial.

Positive Youth Development (Youth Report)

Positive youth development (PYD) was measured using Geldhof et al.'s (2014) seventeen item short measure of the five Cs of PYD. This measure assesses a total PYD score with subscales to measure each of the five Cs: competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring. Youth participants used Likert scales from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) to indicate their level of agreement with items such as, "I have a lot of friends." Participants also used five-point Likert scales to report how important items were to their lives (e.g., "helping to make the world a better place to live in"), and the ability of certain statements to describe them (e.g., "I enjoy being with people who are of a different race than I am"). Items were averaged to create overall and subscale scores. Cronbach's alpha for overall PYD was 0.876 in the present study.

Parental Control (Youth Report)

Parental control was assessed using a five-item subscale of a measure assessing several aspects of parental knowledge and monitoring (Kerr et al., 1999). Youth answered questions such as, "Do you need to have your parent's permission to stay out late on a weekday evening?" and "Do your parents always require that you tell them where you are, who you are with, and what you do together?" using a Likert Scale that ranged from 1 (never) to 5 (always). Item scores were averaged to compute a youth-reported parental control scale score. The Cronbach's alpha for this scale in the present study was 0.83.

Youth Difficulties (Parent Report)

Parents completed the twenty difficulty items of the thirty-three-item strengths and difficulties questionnaire (SDQ; Goodman, 1997), reporting on their child's psychosocial development. Items made up four subscales: emotional problems, conduct problems, hyperactivity, and peer problems. Example items included "often unhappy, depressed or tearful" for emotional problems, "often lies or cheats" for conduct problems, "restless, overactive, cannot stay still for long," for hyperactivity problems and "would rather be alone than with other youth" for peer problems. The items were reported on a Likert scale of 0 (not true) to 3 (certainly true). Five positively worded items such as, "has at least one good friend," were reverse coded. Then, the items were summed to create each subscale score. Cronbach's alpha for each subscale was as follows: 0.802 for the emotional problem subscale, 0.73 for conduct problems, 0.73 for hyperactivity problems, and 0.51 for peer problems. The low Cronbach's alpha for peer problems is consistent with previous literature (Cefai et al., 2011; Palmieri & Smith 2007). Yao et al. (2009) suggest that the reason for the low alpha is that this subscale assesses various types of peer problems, and these problems may not necessarily co-occur for every child. Nonetheless, the sum of peer problems experienced is a meaningful measure of difficulties youth may experience and has implications for development.

Data Analysis

Across all variables, two missing data points were discovered. Since the missing data was minimal and did not substantially impact our analysis, no imputation techniques or other methods to handle missing data were used. Next, a correlation analysis was conducted to explore the associations across all variables. Since youth difficulties subscales were significantly correlated with each other, we included all four subscales (i.e., emotional problems, conduct problems, hyperactivity, and peer problems) in each of the regression models. To examine the relationship between youth difficulties and PYD, we conducted hierarchical

regression controlling for age and gender, since parental control has shown to be implemented or perceived differently for youth with these different demographics (Bowers et al., 2014; Keijsers et al., 2010). We also controlled for race/ethnicity as a proxy for culture. Since the sample predominantly consisted of White and Hispanic participants, we created three categories of White, Hispanic, and Other race to control for race/ethnicity. Next, we ran hierarchical regression with interaction terms between parental control and the four SDQ subscales to examine the relationship between youth difficulties and PYD when youth have different amounts of parental control. To better understand the results of the moderation effect, we further probed significant interaction terms by examining the simple slopes at one standard deviation above and one standard deviation below the mean level of parental control.

Results

Descriptive statistics for all scales are reported in table 1. Correlations among study variables are reported in table 2.

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics*

Variables	N	Mean	SD	Median	Range
Youth age	141	15.15	1.30	15	13–18
Youth emotional difficulties	141	8.75	9.74	5	0–50
Youth conduct difficulties	141	6.06	7.69	5	0–40
Youth hyperactivity difficulties	141	14.07	10.22	15	0–50
Youth peer difficulties	141	10.81	7.80	10	0–40
Parental control	141	3.53	0.78	3.60	1.20–5
Positive youth development	141	3.94	0.53	4.08	2.45–5

Table 2. *Correlation Analysis*

	Emotional Problems	Conduct Problems	Hyperactivity Problems	Peer Problems	Parental Control	PYD	Youth Age	Gender Binary
Emotional problems	1							
Conduct problems	.444**	1						
Hyperactivity problems	.418**	.568**	1					
Peer problems	.497**	.522**	.432**	1				
Parental control	-.104	-.260**	-.214*	-.0164	1			
PYD	-.500**	-.471**	-.341**	-.452**	.379**	1		
Youth age	0.116	-.027	-.081	-.019	-.249**	-.148	1	
Gender binary	0.047	-.264**	-.152*	-.112	.286**	.071	-.022	1

Research Question One: *Are Parental Control and Youth Difficulties Associated with PYD?*

The results of the regression indicate that youths’ age, gender, and race/ethnicity alone did not significantly explain variance in PYD ($Adj-R^2 = .022, F(4,138) = 1.77, p = .138$). However, age, gender, race/ethnicity, parental control, and youth difficulties together explained 41.9% of the variation in PYD outcomes ($Adj-R^2 = .379, F(9,131) = 10.509, p < .001, R^2 \text{ change} = .37$). Parental control had a significant positive association with PYD ($Beta = 0.251, p < .001$). Among the four youth difficulties subscales, emotional problems ($Beta = -.307, p < .001$), conduct problems ($Beta = -.234, p = .019$), and peer problems ($Beta = -.194, p = .026$) showed a significant negative association with PYD. Hyperactivity problems did not show a significant association with PYD ($Beta = -.097, p = .310$). The results are presented in table 3.

Table 3. *Summary of Regression Analyses Examining Parental Control and PYD*

Parameters	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
	Standardized Beta	Standardized Beta	Standardized Beta
Intercept	4.534	4.122	4.869
<i>Demographics</i>			
Youth gender	0.060	-0.051	-0.026
Youth age	-0.123	-0.061	-0.052
Youth race Hispanic	0.118	-0.014	0.053
Youth race other	0.139	0.079	0.035
<i>Parental Control</i>		0.251**	-0.119
<i>Youth Difficulties</i>			
Emotional		-0.307**	-1.004*
Conduct		-0.234*	-0.646
Hyperactivity		0.097	0.574
Peer		-0.194*	-1.043*
<i>Interactions</i>			
PC * emotional problem			0.713
PC * conduct problem			0.394
PC * hyperactivity problem			-0.414
PC * peer problem			0.858*
<i>Model Statistics</i>			
df	4	9	13
p-value	.138	< 0.001	< 0.001
R ²	0.050	0.419**	0.472**
R ² adjusted	0.022	0.379**	0.418**
R ² change	0.050	0.370	0.052

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Research Question 2: *What is the Relationship Between Youth Difficulties and PYD at Different Levels of Parental Control?*

Adding the interactions between parental control and four SDQ subscales to the model of age, gender, race/ethnicity, parental control, youth difficulties explained 47.2% of the variation in PYD ($\text{Adj-R}^2 = .472$, $F(13,129) = 8.723$, $p < .001$). Parental control significantly moderated the association between peer problems and PYD ($\text{Beta} = .858$, $p = .010$), but not the associations between emotional problems ($\text{Beta} = .713$, $p = .056$), conduct problems and PYD ($\text{Beta} = .394$, $p = .302$) and hyperactivity problems ($B = -.414$, $p = .209$).

To further examine this significant interaction, we conducted a simplified regression that included only peer problems, parental control, and the interaction term between parental control and peer problems as predictors of PYD, and then examined simple slopes at one standard deviation above and below the mean levels of parental control. The results showed that at high levels of parental control, there was not a significant relationship between peer problems and PYD ($\text{Beta} = -.01$, $p = .646$). However, at low-levels of parental control, greater levels of peer problems were associated with lower levels of PYD ($\text{Beta} = -.04$, $p = .014$). The results are presented in figure 1.

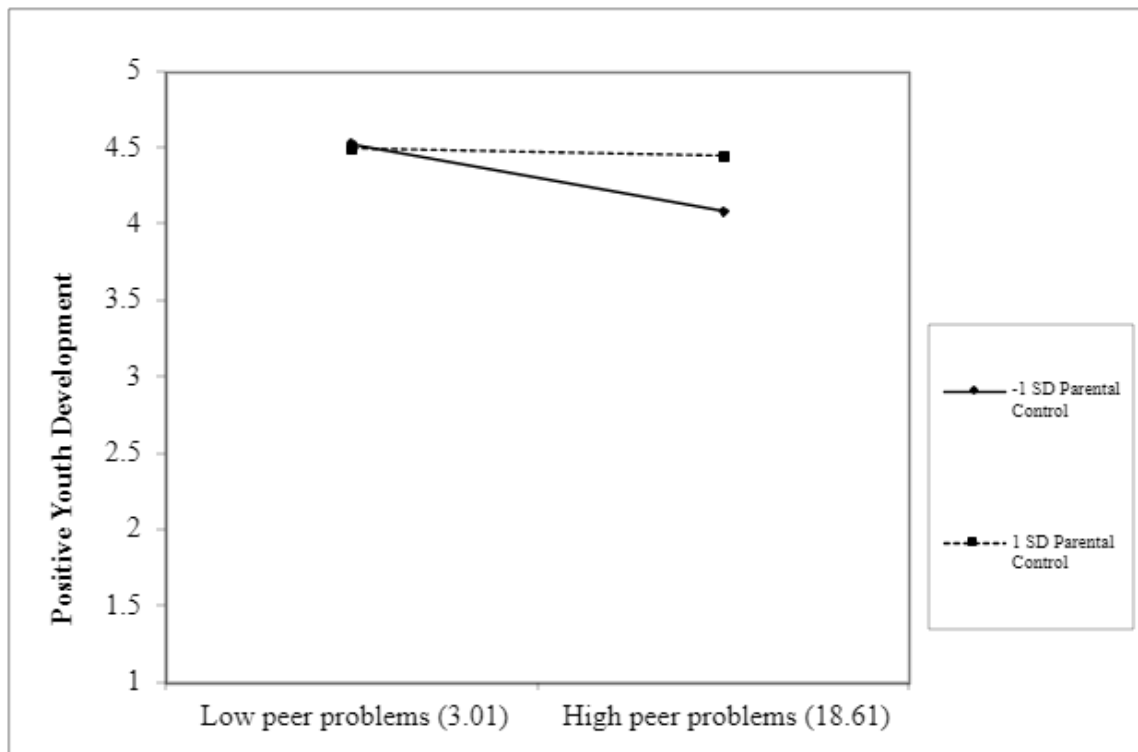


Figure 1. Simple slope plot of the interaction between parental control and peer problems predicting PYD.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between parental control, youth difficulties, and PYD, aiming to determine the extent to which parents serve as developmental assets for youth with social and emotional difficulties through their enactment of rules and restrictions. To achieve this goal, the study examined how parental control and youth difficulties are associated with PYD in a sample of US youth ages thirteen to eighteen. Our findings suggest that although social, emotional, and behavioral difficulties are linked to lower levels of PYD, parental control can serve as a protective developmental asset, especially for youth with peer problems.

Our findings showed that higher levels of emotional problems, conduct problems, and peer problems were associated with lower levels of PYD, underscoring the negative impact of emotional, conduct, and peer problems on adolescent development (Angold & Costello, 2001; Furlong et al., 2004; Trudeau et al., 2012). However, whereas previous research has suggested that hyperactivity problems impact many other areas of adolescent development (Gau et al., 2010), our study demonstrated that these problems were not associated with PYD. This finding suggests that regardless of hyperactivity problems, youth with such difficulties are still exhibiting some positive developmental outcomes at rates similar to their peers.

Furthermore, whereas prior research has focused on parental control as a family-focused strategy for preventing delinquent behaviors among youth (Brauer, 2017; Harris-McKoy & Cui, 2013), our study uniquely examined its effects on promoting PYD and found that parental control is associated with strengths that are important for healthy adolescent development. In particular, our moderation analysis revealed a significant association between peer problems and PYD for youth reporting low-levels of parental control. This result suggests that the absence or limited presence of parental control leaves youth less equipped to navigate peer difficulties effectively, and thus have lower levels of PYD, consistent with research showing inadequate parenting practices contribute to children's associations with deviant peer groups (Engels et al., 2002). These findings emphasize the need for parental control and supervision particularly during adolescence, as this is a period of heightened peer influence, and heightened sensitivity to negative peer interactions (Hancock Hoskins, 2014). Our research also revealed that when adolescents had high levels of parental control, they also exhibited higher levels of PYD regardless of their levels of peer problems. This finding highlights the potential buffering effect of parental control, as it provides a supportive and guiding resource that enables youth to navigate and overcome difficulties related to their social interactions. Specifically, parent-adolescent conversations about peer problems can offer an opportunity for adolescents to develop valuable skills and insights into their social interactions (Cai, 2022) and social competence (Moilanen & Manuel, 2017).

Overall, the findings of the present study contribute to our understanding of the complex dynamics between parental influence, youth difficulties, and positive outcomes during adolescence, and highlight the crucial role of parental control in shaping youth development, particularly in the face of high peer problems. The PYD perspective focuses on the mutually influential relationship between young individuals and their environments, underscoring the significant relationships between the strengths of youths and the resources within their surroundings, and highlighting how these interactions can ultimately lead to positive outcomes (Lerner et al., 2005). However, it is important to recognize that adolescents may also face different types of psychosocial difficulties that constrain PYD during this stage. Therefore, it is crucial to identify ecological resources, such as parental control, that can mitigate the effects of these difficulties and increase the likelihood of positive developmental outcomes for all youth.

Youth development practitioners and other professionals working with families should be aware of the important role that parents play as assets for PYD, especially for youth with peer problems. Developing locally culturally-relevant practices for parental communication with adolescents may be one method of supporting parenting practices that facilitate PYD for these youth. Furthermore, youth with certain types of social and emotional difficulties may be assumed to not be developing positively or be subject to negative

stereotyping based on diagnoses (e.g., Hennig et al., 2023). However, youth with higher levels of reported hyperactivity were not observed to have lower levels of PYD than other youth in the present study. There are also still opportunities to support youth whose social and emotional difficulties are associated with lower levels of PYD. For example, we found that parental control served as a buffer for youth with peer problems, and there are likely other ecological supports that can facilitate PYD for youth with emotional and conduct problems. Awareness of external assets' potential to support PYD among youth with difficulties may help practitioners focus on their strengths.

Limitations and Future Directions

The sample in the current study was collected by convenience sampling approaches using an online survey. Thus, our findings are not generalizable to the US population as a whole or to international populations. Furthermore, the data were collected in the summer of 2021, and study findings must be interpreted in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, when parents and youth may have been spending more time together. Another limitation of this study is its reliance on a cross-sectional research design, which limits our ability to account for potential biases arising from individual differences or variations in circumstances that may affect participants' responses. Additionally, parental control can be substantially affected by culture in terms of the quality and quantity of communication and supervision (Dwairy & Achoui, 2010). This research, however, did not analyze the effect of culture. Therefore, future research employing diverse methodologies and longitudinal data would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay between parental control, youth difficulties, and PYD over time in diverse populations. The study also used a mix of self-report and parent-report measures, which are subjective and may be influenced by various factors, such as social desirability bias or individual interpretation of parental control and social and emotional problems. Future studies should also consider triangulating across youth, parent, and teacher-reported data to better understand how social and emotional difficulties are experienced and perceived by youth and the important adults in their lives.

Finally, it is important to recognize that technological advances in the past two decades have facilitated stricter parental control measures and blurred the distinction between parental control and restrictions on autonomy development. For example, tracking adolescents' activities and whereabouts using smartphone technology greatly increases parental knowledge but undermines trust, an important facet of the parent-child relationship (Mols et al., 2023). In the current study, parental control was measured using self-reported surveys where youth were asked about general parental-control behaviors. However, specific measures related to smartphone tracking or other technological means of monitoring were not included. Future research should consider incorporating explicit questions about different modes of parental control and examining the use and misuse of technological facilitators of parental control and their impact on adolescent development.

Conclusion

Parents and guardians are an extremely important developmental asset for the development of youth (Benson & Saito, 2001; Shek et al., 2019), and therefore may be able to help youth navigate social and emotional difficulties during adolescence. The current study specifically explored parental control in relation to positive youth development among youth with social, emotional, and behavioral difficulties. The findings demonstrate that parental control can support PYD through two pathways: (1) promoting PYD, and (2) reducing the negative effect of youth peer difficulties. This observation that parental control can serve as an ecological asset to support the positive development of youth experiencing peer difficulties also further emphasizes the need for a PYD approach to research and practice with all youth, even those experiencing social and emotional difficulties. Youth programs and practitioners can support

parents in enacting these PYD-promotive practices and can encourage families to engage in more open communication, especially related to navigating and overcoming peer difficulties. Practitioners should emphasize the role of parental control and supervision through communication during adolescence to support positive youth development. Youth development programs and practitioners should also be aware of the diverse psychosocial difficulties adolescents may face and ensure that their practices are inclusive, fully embracing the idea that *all* youth have strengths.

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