

The Influence of Parental Media Mediation on Adolescents Risky Media Use: Controlled vs. Autonomy Supportive Strategies

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Abstract : With the growth of technology and media, teens are increasingly exposed to media such as pornography and engaging in risky media use such as sexting. Parental media mediation strategies including controlling or autonomy supporting strategies can be an important protective factor against risky media uses. The purpose of this study is to examine how parental media mediation around media, influence adolescents' behaviors including frequency of pornography use and sexting. We also examine the effects of parental media mediation on adolescents disclosing pornography use to parents and the amount of secrets that adolescents keep about pornography use. We hypothesize that controlling media mediation will result in more sexting, more frequency pornography use, more secrets about pornography and less disclosure to parents. We also predict that autonomy supportive media mediation will show the opposite pattern. Data for this study came from a nationally representative research project, Project M.E.D.I.A. Participants included 783 adolescents. 49% of the participants were male, and the mean age for boys was 15.44 years (SD= 3.34) and for girls was 15.3 years (SD=2.93). Parental media mediation was assessed using an eight-item measure with subscales of controlling and autonomy supporting media mediation. Participants were also asked if they have ever viewed pornography. If they answered yes, they were asked about the frequency of pornography use as well as if they have ever kept secrets from their parents about it and if they had ever disclosed their pornography use to their parents. The data analysis strategy for this study was a multiple group path analysis. Frequency of pornography use, sexting, secrets from parents and disclosure to parents were predicted by controlling and autonomy supporting parental media mediation, frequency of parents warning against pornography use, income and ethnicity. Groups were distinguished by boys and girls, allowing for sex differences. After running the model in MPLUS, we found partial support for our hypotheses. Autonomy supportive media mediation resulted in less sexting for boys ($\beta = -.15, p < .05$) and girls ($\beta = -.13, p < .05$). Autonomy supportive media mediation also predicted keeping fewer secrets for girls ($\beta = -.27, p < .01$) but had no effect for boys. Controlling media mediation predicted more disclosure about pornography to parents for boys ($\beta = .16, p < .05$) and less disclosure to parents about pornography for girls ($\beta = -.14, p < .05$). Frequency of pornography was not predicted by any of the predictors in the model. Autonomy supportive media mediation was a very strong predictor of less sexting for both boys and girls. Parents should approach media mediation with this supportive and understanding mindset. Parental autonomy support allows adolescents to explore and develop their own moral beliefs without feeling guilt or shame from their parents. This need to have autonomy is also shown by girls disclosing less pornography use to their parents when parents are really controlling about media use. Interestingly, boys disclosed more to their parents when their parents were controlling. Further research is needed on why this is. Further research should also look at the effects that disclosing pornography use to parents has on future pornography use.

Keywords : media, moral development, parental mediation, pornography, sexting

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