

Perceived maternal disapproval of friends: How mothers shape and respond to child and friend adjustment problems



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What We Learned

The findings confirm that friends influence one another's problem behaviors. Mothers respond to these problems with attempts to shape peer relationships. These efforts meet with mixed success, having little or no impact on the behavior of their own children (except when they make things worse), but sparing the friends of their children from the spread of problems.

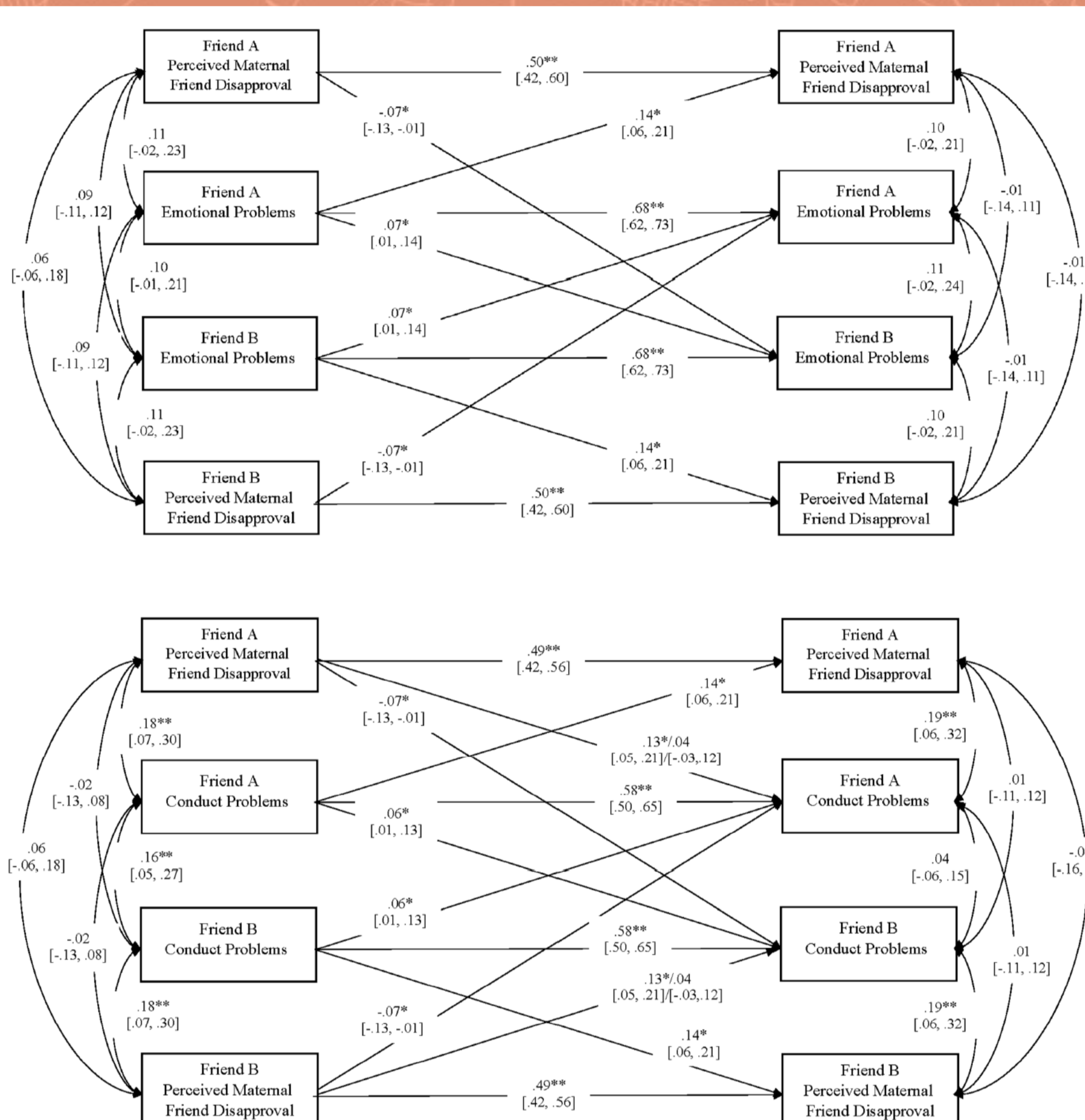
Background

Friends become more similar on a host of adjustment (i.e., conduct and emotional) problems (Giletta et al., 2021). Not surprisingly, many parents respond to these developments by attempting to direct the peer relationships of their children. However, active involvement, such as disapproval or prohibition of peer relations, can backfire, with undesirable consequences (Keijsers et al., 2012).

Aim

The present study seeks to replicate and extend previous work on the topic, to explore the antecedents and consequences of maternal disapproval of friends. Specifically, we examined whether child reports of maternal disapproval of friends anticipate changes in their own emotion and behavior problems and in those of their best friend. We also examined whether mothers increased friendship management efforts in response to their own child's behavior problems and to those of their child's best friend.

Results



Conclusions

Dyadic analyses replicated previous findings in that one friend's conduct and emotional problems forecast changes in the same problems in the other friend. Greater initial problems also anticipated increases in children's perceptions of disapproval of friends by their own—but not their friend's—mother, highlighting maternal efforts to manage the relations of troubled children. These efforts met with mixed success. On the one hand, maternal disapproval of friends did not result in subsequent declines in adjustment problems among their own children; to the contrary, the conduct problems of boys increased with greater maternal involvement. On the other hand, adjustment problems declined among children whose friends reported higher levels of maternal disapproval, suggesting that maternal friendship management may interfere with the spread of problems between children.

Sample

Data was drawn from the longitudinal research project, "Navigating through secondary school: the role of friends and parents (NAVIGATE)".

The sample size was 284 children (148 boys, 136 girls) who were involved in 142 stable friendships.

The age of participants ranged from 10 to 14 at the onset.

Participants filled in the questionnaires two times $M = 14.4$ weeks apart.

Method

Friendships. Participants identified and rank-ordered up to five friends ("Who are your friends?") from a roster that included all children in the classroom;

Adjustment problems. Participants completed an abbreviated version of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (Goodman, 1997). Items were rated on a scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always). Item scores were averaged. Emotional problems include 6 items ($\alpha = 0.82-0.85$) that measure anxiety and sadness (e.g., I worry a lot). Conduct problems include 5 items ($\alpha = 0.69-0.75$) that measure disruptiveness and nonconformity (e.g., I fight a lot.).

Maternal disapproval of friends. Participants completed 5-items from the Parental Management of Peers Inventory (Mounts, 2000), which assessed perceptions of maternal disapproval of or prohibition of peer relationships (e.g., My mother tells me if she does not want me to hang around with certain kids.). Items were rated on a scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always). Item scores were averaged. Internal reliability was acceptable ($\alpha = 0.85-0.87$).

References

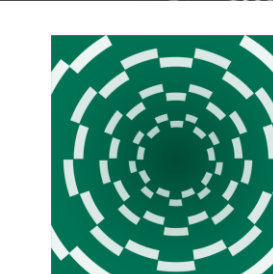
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