

# When Moms Disapprove: Exploring the Ripple Effect on Peer Status of Pre- and Early Adolescents



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## What We Learned

Findings from the present study indicate that parent disapproval of friends in response to child conduct problems damages the child’s standing among peers, which tends to exacerbate behavior problems.

### Background

Conduct problems pose a special challenge to parents. Because most delinquency occurs outside of the home and away from adult supervision, it is not unreasonable for parents to assume that peers bear some responsibility. It is also not unreasonable for parents to assume that they can forestall problems by limiting contact with suspect peers (Tilton-Weaver & Galambos, 2003; Xiong et al., 2020). Growing evidence suggests that their efforts are counterproductive, fomenting rather than discouraging behavior problems (e.g., Tu et al, 2017).

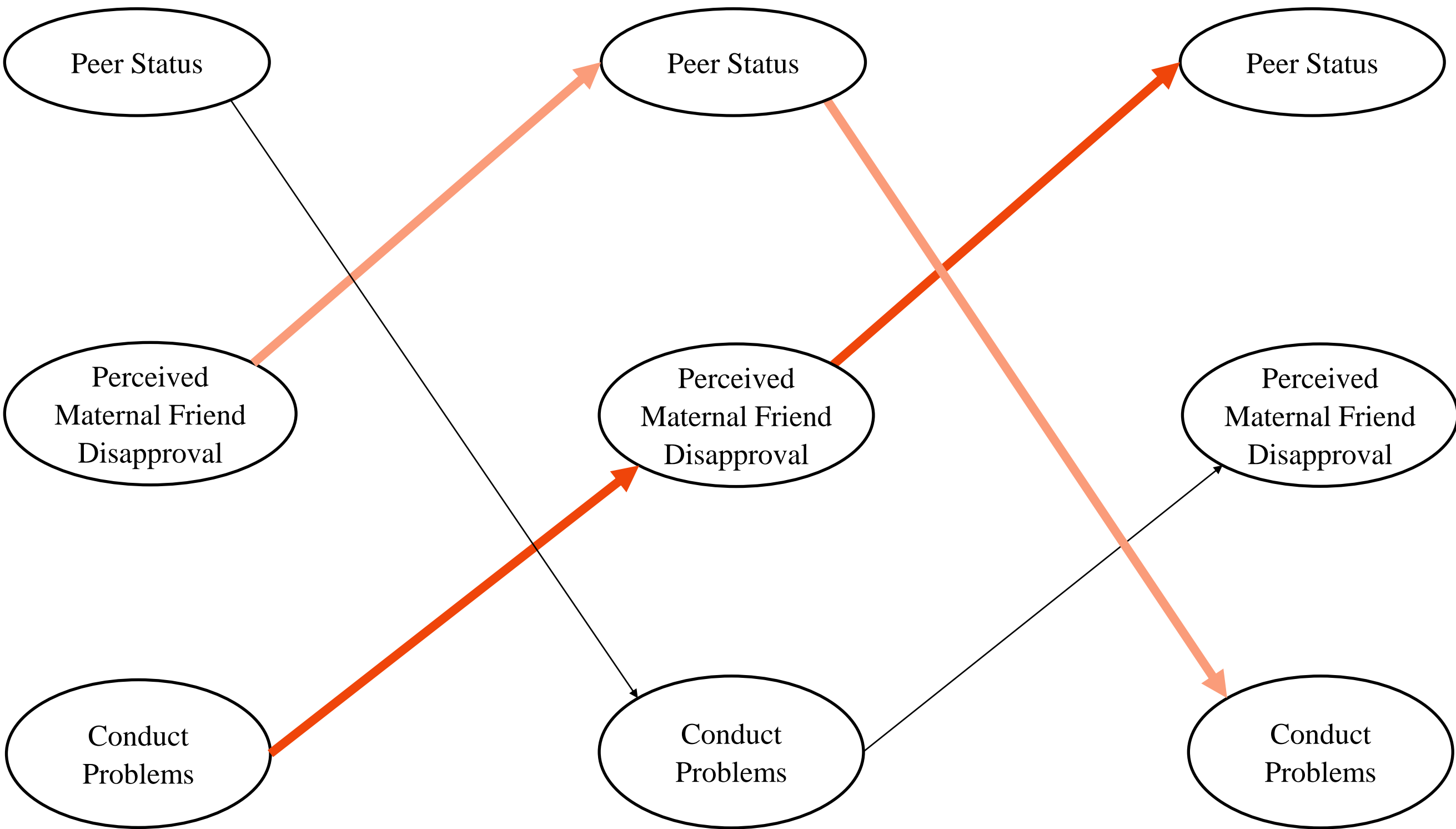
### Aim

In the present study, we seek to explain these counterproductive outcomes, hypothesizing that parent meddling damages the child’s standing among peers, which, in turn, exacerbates behavior problems.

### Sample

Data was drawn from the longitudinal research project, “Navigating through secondary school: the role of friends and parents (NAVIGATE)”. Participants included 562 (292 boys, 270 girls) students ( $M_{age}=11.33$ ,  $SD_{age}=1.15$ ) in a mid-sized community in Lithuania. They filled in the questionnaires three times,  $M = 14.4$  weeks apart.

## Results



**Figure 1**  
*RI-CLPM:*  
*Perceived Maternal Friend Disapproval Predicts Decreasing Peer Status: Conduct Problems as an Antecedent and Outcome*

*Note.*  
Only hypothesized paths depicted.  
Four models were analyzed separately with peer acceptance and rejection as peer status indicators, and with self- and peer-reported conduct problems. Results were replicated, but weaker for acceptance.

## Conclusions

Maternal efforts to intervene in peer relationships by prohibiting friendships in response to child conduct problems appear to backfired. Mothers who countered conduct problems by disapproving friends inadvertently damage the child’s relations with peers, exacerbating their conduct problems.

## Method

**Analysis:** Full longitudinal mediation in Random Intercept Cross Lagged Model with Bayesian estimation.

**Measures:** *Perceived Maternal Friend Disapproval.* 5-items from the Parental Management of Peers Inventory (Mounts, 2001), 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.). Item scores were averaged. Internal reliability was acceptable ( $\alpha = 0.85\text{--}0.87$ ).

*Peer Status.* Participants completed a standard peer nomination inventory. Presented with a roster of all participants, students identified those who best fit each descriptor: Peer acceptance (“Someone you like to spend time with”); and Peer rejection (“Someone you don’t like to spend time with”).

*Conduct Problems.* Self reported: 5 items from the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ, Goodman, 1997) 5 items from the Bergen Questionnaire on Antisocial Behavior (BQAB, Bendixen & Olweus, 1999). Item scores were averaged. ( $\alpha_{SDQ}=.72\text{--}.80$ ,  $\alpha_{BQAB}=.83\text{--}.90$ ). Peer-reported conduct problems (“Someone who acts out or disrupts class”).

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