



# Associations between Parental Media Monitoring, Media Use, and Internalizing Symptoms during Adolescence

Ryan McLean & Laura M. Padilla-Walker  
Brigham Young University



## Introduction

Over 70% of American teenagers (age 13-18) have, or have access to, a smartphone and are spending nearly 9 hours a day on entertainment media (Rideout, 2016), with a recent increase in media multi-tasking (Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010). This is concerning because previous research has highlighted associations between media use and internalizing behaviors (Bickham, Hswen, & Rich, 2015). However, there is hope because parental monitoring of a child’s media may be an effective way to attenuate the potentially negative effects of media use (Nathanson & Cantor, 2000), especially when done in an autonomy-supportive way (Fikkers, Potrowski, & Valkenburg, 2017; Padilla-Walker, Coyne, & Collier, 2016), possibly because this strategy helps meet the adolescent’s internal needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Therefore, the purpose of the study was to better understand the role of autonomy-supportive parental media monitoring on adolescents’ internalizing behavior via reduced time spent with various forms of media.

## Methods

**Participants.** National sample consisting of 1155 adolescents ages 10-20 (51% female), with 315 early adolescents (ages 10-12), 315 middle adolescents (ages 13-15) and 525 late adolescents (ages 16+). Ethnicity was 69% European American, 13% African American, 11% Hispanic, and 5% Asian American. Average household income was between \$35 and \$49,000, with 30% of the sample making less than \$35,000 annually and just over 10% making more than \$100,000 annually. Participants completed an online survey and were invited to participate through Qualtrics.

**Parental Media Monitoring.** Adolescents responded to 12 items (Valkenburg et al., 2013) on a Likert scale of 1 (*never*) to 5 (*very often*). After indicating how parents monitor media, adolescents answered items such as “They would...explain to me why it’s better to not play those games”. This resulted in autonomy supportive and controlling subscales of media monitoring.

**Media Use.** Adolescents reported on daily media use for several types of media (Stockdale, Coyne, & Padilla-Walker, 2018) on a Likert scale of 1 (*none*) to 9 (*9 or more hours*). The stem for each question was “How much time do you spend on the following media activities on a typical day?”

**Media Multi-tasking.** Adolescents responded to 1 item (Baumgartner, Weeda, van der Heijden, & Huizinga, 2014) on a Likert scale of 1 (*never*) to 4 (*very often*). The item was “While using any type of media how often do you do other activities involving the media?”

**Anxiety.** Adolescents self-reported 3 items (Spence, 1998,  $\alpha = .81$ ) on a scale of 1 (*not at all*) to 4 (*a lot*). An example item was “I worry that something bad will happen to me.”

**Depression.** Adolescents responded to 3 items (CES-DC; Faulstich, 1986,  $\alpha = .88$ ) on a Likert scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 4 (*a lot*). Example items include “I wasn’t able to feel happy, even when my family or friends tried to make me feel better”

**Controls.** Model controlled for Adolescent Age, Household Income, and Gender

## Results

- Conducted t-tests to explore sex differences on all variables
- Conducted ANOVAs to explore differences on all variables as a function of child’s age (10-12 early, 13-15 middle, 16-20 late adolescence)
- Path analysis using structural equation modeling was explored using two dimensions of media monitoring style (autonomy-supportive versus controlling; active and restrictive) as predictors of adolescents’ time with various types of media. Media use was then used to predict adolescents’ depression and anxiety. Controls included adolescent sex (0 = male, 1 = female), adolescent age, and household income. See Figure1.



## Discussion

### Media monitoring style

- Autonomy-restrictive monitoring was the only parental monitoring style associated with less media time
- Autonomy-supportive approaches were associated with lower levels of internalizing problems while controlling approaches were associated with higher levels

### Gender differences

- Gender did not moderate the positive paths between media multitasking and depression and anxiety, or the paths between social media and anxiety
- Video games were positively associated with depression and anxiety for boys, but not girls
- Television and texting were negatively associated with internalizing behaviors for boys, but not girls.

### Media Types

- Social media and video game use were the only media types positively associated with internalizing symptoms

### Age

- There were minimal age differences with late adolescents receiving less parental media monitoring, engaging in higher levels of internet use, and listening to more music.

### Future Research

- Some ideas for future research include: exploring why some platforms may be more detrimental, while others may be protective (e.g., texting and television for boys); examine the variables longitudinally to determine direction of effects; explore additional mediators.

