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Custom-fit Parenting: How Low- and Well-Accepted Young Adolescents Benefit from Peer-related Parenting

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SYNOPSIS

Objective.—The present study investigated whether longitudinal associations between peer-related parenting behaviors (facilitation of peer interactions, social coaching about peer problems) and peer adjustment were moderated by young adolescents' peer status.

Design.—Participants included 123 young adolescents ($M_{\text{age}} = 12.03$ years; 50% boys; 58.5% European American) at Time 1. At Time1 (summer before the middle school transition), parents reported on their facilitation of peer interaction opportunities and coaching strategies to a hypothetical peer exclusion situation; teachers reported on youth peer acceptance. At Times 1 and 2 (spring after the middle school transition), youth reported on peer adjustment (friendship quality, loneliness, peer victimization).

Results.—Peer acceptance (pre-middle school transition) moderated prospective associations between peer-related parenting and peer adjustment, yielding two patterns of associations. Parental facilitation predicted better friendship quality and lower levels of loneliness over time among youth with high peer acceptance, but not among youth with low peer acceptance. In contrast, parental social coaching predicted better friendship quality among youth with low peer acceptance, but lower friendship quality among youth with high peer acceptance.

Conclusions.—Not all forms of positive peer-related parenting are equally beneficial for all youth. Well-accepted youth may have the social opportunities to take advantage of parental facilitation, whereas low-accepted youth may have greater social needs and benefit from support in

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Conflict of Interest Disclosures:

Each author signed a form for disclosure of potential conflicts of interest. No authors reported any financial or other conflicts of interest in relation to the work described.

Ethical Principles:

The authors affirm having followed professional ethical guidelines in preparing this work. These guidelines include obtaining informed consent from human participants, maintaining ethical treatment and respect for the rights of human or animal participants, and ensuring the privacy of participants and their data, such as ensuring that individual participants cannot be identified in reported results or from publicly available original or archival data.

the form of social coaching. Implications of these findings are discussed in relation to the literatures on peer-related parenting and peer adjustment.

Keywords

parenting; facilitation; social coaching; peer acceptance; peer adjustment

INTRODUCTION

Peer relationships and friendships serve important socialization functions in early adolescence, but can also be sources of distress (Parker, Rubin, Erath, Wojslawowicz, & Buskirk, 2006). Indeed, youth become more concerned about social evaluation (Westenberg, Gullone, Bokorst, Heyne, & King, 2007) and developing and maintaining friendships (Duchesne, Ratelle, & Roy, 2012). Additionally, approximately 50% of youth report experiencing at least occasional peer problems, such as peer exclusion or victimization (Wang, Iannotti, & Nansel, 2009), which are often associated with internalizing and externalizing problems, as well as academic underachievement (Nakamoto & Schwartz, 2010; Reijntjes, Kamphuis, Prinzie, Boelen, van der Schoot, & Telch, 2011; Reijntjes, Kamphuis, Prinzie, & Telch, 2010). Parents often recognize the importance of peer relationships and may offer support in different ways, such as *facilitating* opportunities for peer interactions more generally or serving as *social coaches* in peer problem situations (Ladd & Pettit, 2002; Mounts, 2008). Emerging literature suggests that youth may be receptive or open to parental suggestions about peer relationships (Gregson, Erath, Pettit, & Tu, 2015) and benefit from parental involvement during this developmental period (Mounts, 2002; Poulin, Nadeau, Scaramella 2012; Vernberg, Greenhoot, & Biggs, 2006).

However, it is unlikely that all youth benefit equally from parental involvement in their peer relationships (e.g., Abaied, Wagner, & Sanders, 2014; Gregson et al., 2015; Tu, Erath, Pettit, & El-Sheikh, 2014). The influence of parental involvement may vary depending on youths' peer status. For instance, youth with low peer acceptance may have greater *social needs* and could benefit from more parental support and involvement (e.g., facilitation and social coaching) in general. Yet, youth with high peer acceptance may have more *social opportunities* in which to take advantage of parental support and involvement. Alternatively, consistent with the goodness-of-fit model in which youth adjustment depends on the match or fit between the child and environment (Lerner & Lerner, 1994; Thomas & Chess, 1977), certain forms of peer-related parenting (e.g., facilitation versus social coaching) may be better-suited for low- versus well-accepted youth, but this idea is seldom tested within a single study (e.g., Kochanska, 1995, 1997). Thus, the aim of the present study was to investigate whether young adolescents' peer acceptance before the middle school transition moderated the prospective associations between peer-related parenting (facilitation, coaching) and indices of peer adjustment (friendship quality, loneliness, peer victimization) across the middle school transition. We were particularly interested in the potentially different effects of parental facilitation and parental social coaching for youth with higher compared to lower peer acceptance.

Peer-related Parenting and Youth Peer Adjustment

In line with conceptual frameworks of parenting and peer relationships, parental facilitation and social coaching are conceptualized as direct (as opposed to indirect) forms of parenting, or parenting behaviors intended to bolster youth social development (Ladd & Pettit, 2002). Further, as discussed in the conceptual frameworks by Ladd and Pettit (2002) and Mounts (2008), parents' involvement in youth peer relationships can take different forms. For instance, parental *facilitation* reflects parents' role as mediators of peer relationships, where parents attempt to "bridge" the family and peer contexts by managing and providing opportunities for peer interactions (Ladd & Pettit, 2002; Mounts, 2008). Parental facilitation strategies include allowing friends to come over or driving children to activities with friends (Vernberg, Berry, Ewell, & Abwender, 1993; Vernberg et al., 2006). Parental *social coaching* reflects parents' role as consultants regarding peer relationships, where parents provide advice or help youth to problem-solve challenging peer situations (Ladd & Pettit, 2002; Mounts, 2008) through behavioral or cognitive framing strategies (Mize & Pettit, 1997). In contrast to facilitation, which is more proximal to the peer world, social coaching in adolescence is more distal, occurring in "decontextualized discussions" outside of the peer context. Thus, parental facilitation and social coaching are two distinct forms of peer-related parenting, serving separate functions and differing in proximity to the peer world.

Parental Facilitation.—Parental facilitation of peer interactions may be particularly important in promoting peer adjustment for young adolescents across the transition to middle school due to youth exposure to a more diverse student population, changes to the peer network or hierarchy, and potential disruptions to existing friendships (Eccles, Lord, & Buchanan, 1996). To navigate these ecological changes successfully, adolescents may benefit from a greater variety and frequency of occasions for meeting new peers and building friendships (Aikins, Bierman, & Parker, 2005; Brown & Braun, 2013), especially because friendships at this age are grounded in interests and personalities, more than simple proximity (Parker et al., 2006). Indeed, parents' provisions of opportunities for peer interactions prospectively predict greater adolescent-reported friendship intimacy and companionship among re-located 12 to 14-year-old adolescents (Vernberg et al., 1993, 2006) as well as greater teacher-reported social competence and higher sociometric ratings of peer acceptance among 10-year-old children (McDowell & Parke, 2009). Additionally, in an intervention for 6- to 10-year-old children with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), parents who learned how to facilitate and better organize peer interaction opportunities had children with fewer negative peer nominations (Mikami, Jack, Emeh, & Stephens, 2010).

Although this literature provides some support for positive associations between parental facilitation and peer adjustment, the findings are not entirely consistent. For instance, parental facilitation strategies involving meeting parents of adolescents' peers, generally encouraging activities, and talking to adolescents about peers, were not as strongly linked with peer adjustment compared to strategies that allowed adolescents to spend more time with peers (McDowell & Parke, 2009; Vernberg et al., 1993). Thus, focusing on parents' strategies for enabling adolescents' proximity to peers may be particularly important for promoting positive peer outcomes.

Parental Social Coaching.—Parental social coaching is another developmentally relevant aspect of parenting to examine in early adolescence because the transition to middle school, coupled with developmental changes, may create or exacerbate peer challenges. For instance, the disruption of the peer network can contribute to concerns about peer exclusion or victimization as youth attempt to establish their place in a new social hierarchy (Juvonen, Wang, & Espinoza, 2013). Additionally, physical changes related to puberty and emerging abstract thinking abilities may increase youth concerns about social evaluation (Westenberg et al., 2007). Indeed, many youth experience peer problems, such as peer exclusion and being the target of rumors, insults, or threats of harm (Robers, Zhang, Morgan, Musu-Gillette, U.S. Department of Education, & U.S. Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs, 2015), particularly in middle school (Hong & Espelage, 2012).

Thus, parental social coaching may be one avenue through which youth peer problems could be addressed. However, very few studies have examined parental social coaching, particularly during this social-stress laden transition to middle school. Further, existing studies reveal inconsistent positive and negative effects of parental social coaching. Some studies have revealed the benefits of parental social coaching (e.g., prosocial strategies, quantity and quality or feasibility), such as higher social competence and social status among 3- to 5-year old children (Finnie & Russell, 1988; Mize & Pettit, 1997) as well as more prosocial behavior and reduced friendship conflict among 13-year-old adolescents (Poulin et al., 2012). Similar benefits of coaching were found in intervention research, such that 6- to 10-year-old children with ADHD had higher teacher-reported peer liking and lower peer rejection after parents received friendship coaching (social skills) training (Mikami, Lerner, Griggs, McGrath, & Calhoun, 2010). Conversely, other studies revealed that social coaching was associated with poorer peer adjustment among third- and fourth-grade children, which may reflect parents' reaction to youths' existing peer problems (McDowell & Parke, 2009; McDowell, Parke, & Wang, 2003; see also Tilton-Weaver & Galambos, 2003).

Whereas parental facilitation may depend on social *opportunities* (initiated by parent or youth), occasions for parental social coaching may depend on youths' experiences of social *challenges*, which suggest that these two parenting strategies may be suitable for specific social conditions and may not uniformly promote peer adjustment across all youth. The different contexts in which parents may engage in facilitation or social coaching highlight the need to examine youth characteristics or experiences (e.g., peer acceptance) that elucidate which youth benefit the most from each type of peer-related parenting.

Peer Acceptance as a Moderator

The conditional effects of parenting on youth adjustment have been documented in the Parenting x Child interaction literature. For instance, the effects of general parenting on a wide range of youth adjustment indices have been shown to vary as a function of child temperament, or vice versa (for a review see Kiff, Lengua, & Zalewski, 2011). Only a few studies have tested interactions between parenting and peer acceptance specifically, yielding evidence of the conditional effects on youth adjustment. For instance, Birkeland, Breivik, and Wold (2014) examined the moderating role of peer acceptance among 13-year-old

adolescents, and found that higher closeness to parents predicted higher levels of global self-esteem among adolescents with high peer acceptance, but not among adolescents with low peer acceptance. Thus, more positive parenting coupled with high peer acceptance yielded better adjustment.

However, revealing a different pattern of association, two studies conceptualizing parenting as the moderator found that positive parenting (i.e., emotion coaching) was more protective for youth with lower peer status. For instance, fourth- through sixth-grade youth who were rated by peers as low in sociability and respect were at risk for higher levels of loneliness when parents engaged in low levels of emotion coaching, but were protected against loneliness at high levels of emotion coaching (Buckholdt, Kitzmann, & Cohen, 2016). Similarly, aggressive/rejected kindergarten and first-grade children were protected against poorer emotion regulation skills when mothers engaged in more emotion coaching, but were at increased risk of poorer emotion regulation in the context of low emotion coaching (Wilson et al., 2014).

As these three studies indicate, the effects of unique positive parenting behaviors may differ for youth with low or high peer status. Whereas parental closeness was more effective for well-accepted adolescents (Birkeland et al., 2014), parental emotion coaching protected low-accepted youth from adjustment difficulties (Buckholdt et al., 2016; Wilson et al., 2014). Collectively, these findings support the goodness-of-fit framework, which proposes that youth adjustment depends on the match between the child and the environment (e.g., Lerner & Lerner, 1994; Thomas & Chess, 1977).

Extending this goodness-of-fit framework to the peer domain, the present study simultaneously examined two parenting strategies in an attempt to illuminate the unique “fit” of parental facilitation and social coaching with youth peer acceptance. High or low peer acceptance may reflect *social opportunities* or *social needs*, respectively, and could differentially moderate the effectiveness of facilitation versus coaching. For instance, parental facilitation may promote peer adjustment among well-accepted youth who have more social opportunities and can take advantage of parents’ efforts to promote social interactions. In contrast, low-accepted youth may lack the social skills to successfully interact with their peers, and thus may be less able to benefit from parents’ facilitation efforts. Rather, low-accepted youth have greater social needs which may be uniquely addressed through parents’ social coaching strategies for managing peer challenges. There is some evidence to support this conceptualization of differential effects of parenting behaviors. As one example, Kochanska (1995, 1997) found that conscience development was promoted among children with fearful and fearless temperaments via different parenting processes tested simultaneously. Whereas gentle discipline was associated with conscience development among temperamentally fearful children (but not fearless children), secure mother-child attachment promoted conscience development among temperamentally fearless children (but not fearful children). Thus, the aim of the present study was to test a similar conceptual model within the peer domain.

The Present Study

Using a longitudinal, multi-informant design with a focus on the peer domain, the present study examined whether young adolescents' peer acceptance before the middle school transition moderates associations linking peer-related parenting behaviors before the middle school transition with multiple indices of peer adjustment in middle school. Given the relative distinctiveness of parental facilitation versus social coaching (Ladd & Pettit, 2002), as well as the disparate contexts in which these parenting behaviors may occur, we hypothesized that low- and well-accepted youth might differentially benefit from facilitation and social coaching. Well-accepted youth may have more social opportunities to take advantage of parental facilitation of peer interactions, whereas low-accepted youth may have more social needs in which they could benefit from parental social coaching about managing peer challenges. We also recognize that other patterns are possible, such that both facilitation and social coaching could benefit low-accepted youth because these youth may require more parental support in general. Alternatively, well-accepted youth may not only have the social opportunities to take advantage of parental facilitation, but also the skills to successfully utilize parental coaching suggestions.

METHOD

Participants

Data for the current study were collected as part of a larger longitudinal project examining physiological and coping responses across the transition to middle school (Erath, Bub, & Tu, 2016; Erath & Tu, 2014). At Time 1 (T1; before the middle school transition) participants included 123 fifth and sixth grade students ($M_{\text{age}} = 12.03$ years, $SD = .64$; 50% boys) and one parent (82% biological mothers, 67% married) and one teacher (81% of teacher reports obtained at T1) per adolescent. The sample included 58.5% European Americans (EA), 35% African Americans, and 6.5% other ethnicities, representative of the communities from which participants were recruited. The percent of families reporting the following ranges of annual income was: 21% for income < \$20,000, 33.6% for \$20,000 - \$50,000, 21% for \$50,000 - \$75,000, and 24.4% for income > \$75,000. Approximately 80% of T1 participants returned at Time 2 (T2; after the middle school transition); 20% attrition was mostly due to families re-locating or changes to their contact information. At T2, participants included 99 adolescents ($M_{\text{age}} = 12.78$ years, $SD = .63$) and one parent (81% biological mothers) and one teacher (87% of teacher reports obtained at T2) per adolescent. Individual *t*-tests were conducted to test differences between participants with and without T2 data, revealing no differences on any demographic or primary study variable.

Procedures

The present study is based on a larger longitudinal project, and only pertinent procedures are discussed. The short-term longitudinal design involved two waves of data collection spaced approximately 10 months apart. Participants were recruited across two cohorts ($n = 63$ and 60, respectively), separated by one year, via informational letters sent home with fifth and sixth grade students in five elementary schools in two counties in the Southeastern United States. We distributed letters to approximately 28 classrooms across the five elementary schools for each cohort. Our method of recruitment precludes an accurate assessment of

participation rate based on the number of parents who were aware of the study. Exclusion criteria included children with diagnoses of a pervasive developmental disorder, intellectual disability, or social phobia, due to the nature of the laboratory activities. At T1, parents who responded to the letters were given information about the study and were scheduled for a research visit over the phone during the spring. Permission to contact teachers was obtained via mail. Teachers were contacted in the spring to participate; consent was obtained, and teachers completed a questionnaire about participants' peer acceptance and were compensated monetarily.

Young adolescents and their parents visited the research laboratory during the summer before youth transitioned to middle school; consent and assent to participate were obtained, and youth and their parents were compensated monetarily. Youth completed questionnaires about their peer adjustment, and parents completed questionnaires about parenting behaviors. At T2, after youth transitioned to middle school, parents and youth were re-contacted for a follow-up visit during the spring. Youth and their parents visited the research laboratory in spring, with youth completing questionnaires; the same consent, assent, and compensation procedures used at T1 were used at T2. All study procedures, including the informational letter for recruitment, were approved by the university's institutional review board.

Predictor Variables at T1

Control Variables.—Sociodemographic variables that were associated with primary study variables were controlled in analyses. Controls included youth gender (coded 0 = boys, 1 = girls), age at T1 (in years), ethnicity (coded 0 = EA, 1 = minority), and annual household income ($M = 4.13$, $SD = 1.55$) reported on a 6-point scale (1 = < \$10,000 to 6 = > than \$75,000).

Parental Facilitation.—Parents completed 10 items adapted from the Child Development Project (Dodge, Bates, & Pettit, 1990) and Friendship Facilitation Questionnaire (FFQ; Vernberg et al., 1993), including three items created for the present study. Items assess the extent to which parents actively facilitate and allow permission for peer interaction opportunities (e.g., "Do you drive your child to friends' homes?") and actively promote peer interactions with similar peers (e.g., "How much do you make extra efforts to help your child find or spend time with peers who are a good match with your child's interests/hobbies?"). Items were rated on a 5-point scale (0 = *never* to 4 = *very often*). The reliability and validity of the items from the FFQ have been established (Vernberg et al., 1993; 2006); reliability was high in this study ($\alpha = .84$).

Parental Social Coaching.—Social coaching was coded based on parents' open-ended responses to a hypothetical situation about peer exclusion, a common peer challenge particularly relevant around the middle school transition. Parents were presented with the following situation: "Let's say that some kids at school planned a weekend activity for a few weeks from now, and your child has not been invited." Parents were asked to read the situation and provide a written response to the following question: "What are one or two specific ways in which you would advise your child to deal with this situation?" The

question was framed in an open-ended manner so that parents' responses were not biased by the availability of forced-choice items. The number of responses from parents ranged from 1 to 5, with 2.5% ($n = 3$) not providing any advice.

Based on the content of parents' open-ended responses, and coding schemes in the social coaching (Finnie & Russell, 1988; McDowell & Parke, 2009; Mize & Pettit, 1997) and coping (Compas, Conner-Smith, Saltzman, Thomsen, & Wadsworth, 2001) literatures, a coding scheme was developed by the first and third authors to capture the quality of parents' prosocial behavioral advice and benign cognitive interpretations. Approximately 49% of parents provided both behavioral and cognitive framing advice, 28% provided only behavioral advice, and 23% provided only cognitive framing advice. To reduce the amount of missing data and capture the quality of overall parental social coaching, parents' behavioral and cognitive framing strategies were coded together on a continuous 4-point scale from low to high quality (1 = *avoidant-negative* to 4 = *prosocial-benign*; e.g., Hane & Barrios, 2011; Mize & Pettit, 1997). Lower scores included statements discouraging youth from being friends with the children who excluded him/her or implying that those children were not his/her real friends. Higher scores included statements such as encouraging youth to plan activities with peers or discussing multiple explanations for the exclusion (e.g., limited number of invitations). As a validity check for this hypothetical, yet common peer stress scenario, parents were asked to indicate whether this advice was similar to advice they had actually given to their child. Approximately 8% reported they had not given this kind of advice to their child; 27.9% and 63.9% indicated that this was somewhat or very much like advice they had given, respectively.

For coding, research assistants blind to study hypotheses were trained on parent responses from one cohort, and then subsequently provided final codes for the other cohort. The first author coded 100% of the responses, so that all responses were double-coded. The research assistants were required to reach acceptable inter-rater reliability (intra-class correlation $> .70$) during training. Discrepant scores were resolved by consensus, and inter-rater reliability was high (intra-class correlation = $.87$).

Peer Acceptance.—Teachers completed the 2-item Peer Acceptance subscale (e.g., “This child is well-liked by peers”; “This child is disliked by other children” – reverse-scored) of the Social Behavior Rating Scale (SBRS; Schwartz, Farver, Chang, & Lee-Shin, 2002). Items were rated on a 5-point scale (1 = *almost never true* to 5 = *almost always true*). Reliability and validity of the SBRS subscales have been established (Schwartz et al., 2002), and reliability was high in this study $\alpha = (.79)$. In a prior study, teacher reports of peer acceptance on the SBRS were highly correlated with peer nominations of acceptance and liking ($r = .63, p < .001$; Schwartz et al., 2002). Further, both teacher reports and sociometric ratings were similarly correlated with youth outcomes in the expected directions (Schwartz, Chang, & Farver, 2001; Schwartz et al., 2002).

Outcome Variables at T1 and T2

Friendship Quality.—Youth completed eight items adapted from the widely used and well-validated Friendship Quality Questionnaire (Parker & Asher, 1993), which assesses

friendship quality (e.g., “My friends care about me.”, “I can count on my friends when I need them.”) on a 5-point scale (1= *not at all true* to 5 = *very true*). The smaller subset of items was adapted to focus on friends more generally rather than a specific friend and was reliable in this study (T1 $\alpha = .79$, T2 $\alpha = .81$) and prior studies (Erath, Flanagan & Bierman, 2008; Flanagan, Erath, & Bierman, 2008).

Loneliness.—Youth completed the 17-item Loneliness and Social Dissatisfaction Questionnaire (Asher, Hymel, & Renshaw, 1984), excluding filler items. Items (e.g., “I feel alone at school.”, “Is it hard for you to get along with other kids at school?”) were rated on a 4-point scale (1 = *never* to 4 = *always*). Internal consistency was high (T1 $\alpha = .83$, T2 $\alpha = .89$). For brevity, hereafter we refer to this construct as loneliness.

Peer Victimization.—Youth reported on peer victimization using seven items from the Social Experiences Questionnaire (Crick & Grotpeter, 1996; Cullerton-Sen & Crick, 2005). Items (e.g., “How often have other kids said mean things about you to keep other people from liking you?”, “How often do you get pushed or shoved by other peers at school?”) were rated on a 5-point scale (1= *almost never* to 5= *almost always*). Reliability and validity have been established in samples with young adolescents (Crick & Grotpeter, 1996), and reliability was high in this study (T1 $\alpha = .85$, T2 $\alpha = .86$).

Plan of Analysis

Preliminary analyses examining descriptive statistics and correlations among all study variables were conducted (Table 1). Skewness statistics of primary study variables were within the acceptable range (± 2.06). Next, regression analyses (Table 2) were conducted in AMOS (Arbuckle, 2012), which used full information maximum likelihood estimation to handle missing data (Acock, 2005). Path models were used given our aim to test differential effects of parental facilitation and social coaching, as well as the use of multiple indices to assess unique aspects of peer adjustment (i.e., friendship quality, loneliness, peer victimization). All continuous predictor variables were mean-centered for analyses and separate models were fit for each outcome. First, controls, including demographic variables and the autoregressive effect of corresponding peer adjustment, were entered. Next, parental facilitation and social coaching were entered, followed by peer acceptance. Finally, interaction terms between each of the parenting variables and peer acceptance were entered.

Following standard procedures, simple slopes of significant interactions were tested to clarify the associations among variables (Aiken & West, 1991). These associations were plotted to examine the association between the predictor (parenting) and outcome (peer adjustment) at lower ($-1 SD$) and higher ($+ 1 SD$) levels of the continuous moderator variable (peer acceptance). Illustrative plots of significant interactions are presented in Figures 1 – 3.

RESULTS

Preliminary Analyses

Descriptive statistics and correlations are presented in Table 1. Participants' reports of loneliness were relatively low in this sample. Parental facilitation and social coaching were modestly and positively correlated. The indices of peer adjustment were moderately to highly stable from T1 to T2. Additionally, friendship quality was negatively associated with loneliness and peer victimization, whereas loneliness and peer victimization were positively correlated at T1 and T2. Parental facilitation was positively correlated with T2 friendship quality, and peer acceptance was linked with more positive peer adjustment at T1 and T2, including higher levels of and friendship quality and lower levels of loneliness and peer victimization.

Participants from higher income households had parents who engaged in more prosocial coaching, $r(113) = .33, p < .001$, had higher teacher-reported peer acceptance, $r(96) = .27, p < .01$, lower levels of peer victimization at T1, $r(116) = -.22, p < .05$, and higher levels of friendship quality at T2, $r(93) = .22, p < .05$. *T*-tests examining gender and ethnicity differences revealed that compared to boys, girls' parents engaged in more facilitation, $M_{\text{girls}} = 2.61, SD = .70; M_{\text{boys}} = 2.34, SD = .79; t(121) = -1.99, p < .05$, and girls reported greater T2 friendship quality, $M_{\text{girls}} = 4.28, SD = .73; M_{\text{boys}} = 3.86, SD = .58; t(96) = -.3.12, p < .01$. Additionally, compared to minority participants, EA participants received higher levels of parental facilitation, $M_{\text{EA}} = 2.59, SD = .71; M_{\text{minority}} = 2.31, SD = .79; t(121) = 2.12, p < .05$, and prosocial coaching, $M_{\text{EA}} = 2.51, SD = .77; M_{\text{minority}} = 2.22, SD = .60; t(116) = 2.23, p < .05$.

Parental Facilitation, Social Coaching, and Peer Acceptance

Friendship Quality.—The model yielded a good fit to the data, $\chi^2(35, N = 123) = 35.11, p = .46; \chi^2/\text{df ratio} = 1.00; \text{CFI} = 1.00; \text{RMSEA} = .01, ns$. As shown in Table 2, gender, income, and the autoregressive effect of T1 friendship quality were significant predictors of T2 friendship quality. Main effects of peer acceptance, but not parental facilitation or social coaching, predicted higher friendship quality over time.

Central to the present study, peer acceptance moderated the associations linking parental facilitation and social coaching with change in friendship quality from T1 to T2 (Table 2). Parental facilitation predicted higher levels of T2 friendship quality, $B = .20, SE = .06, \beta = .21, p < .01$, among youth with high peer acceptance, but not among youth with low peer acceptance, $B = -.06, SE = .06, \beta = -.06, p = .36$ (Figure 1). As shown in Figure 1, at high levels of parental facilitation, youth with high peer acceptance had higher levels of friendship quality (predicted $M = 4.22$) than those with low peer acceptance (predicted $M = 3.59$), a difference of approximately .91 *SD*.

In contrast, parental social coaching predicted higher levels of friendship quality at T2 among youth with low peer acceptance, $B = .32, SE = .07, \beta = .30, p < .001$, but lower levels of friendship quality among youth with high peer acceptance, $B = -.27, SE = .07, \beta = -.26, p < .001$ (Figure 2). As shown in Figure 2, at low levels of parental social coaching, youth with low peer acceptance had lower predicted means on friendship quality ($M = 3.41$)

compared to youth with high peer acceptance ($M = 4.24$), with a difference of about 1.20 *SD*. However, at high levels of parental social coaching, youth with low and high peer acceptance had similar levels of friendship quality.

Loneliness.—The model was a good fit to the data, $\chi^2(34, N = 123) = 32.17, p = .568$; χ^2/df ratio = .95; CFI = 1.00; RMSEA = .00, *ns*. As shown in Table 2, friendship quality and the autoregressive effect of T1 loneliness on T2 loneliness were significant. Peer acceptance, but not parental facilitation or social coaching, predicted lower levels of loneliness over time.

Further, peer acceptance moderated the association between parental facilitation and change in loneliness from T1 to T2 (Table 2). Simple slopes analyses revealed that parental facilitation predicted lower levels of loneliness at T2 among youth with high peer acceptance, $B = -.06, SE = .03, \beta = -.13, p = .05$, but not among youth with low peer acceptance, $B = .05, SE = .03, \beta = .10, p = .14$ (Figure 3). At high levels of parental facilitation, youth with high peer acceptance had lower levels of loneliness (predicted $M = .18$), whereas youth with low peer acceptance had higher levels of loneliness (predicted $M = .55$), a difference of about 1.19 *SD*.

Peer Victimization.—The model was a good fit to the data, $\chi^2(34, N = 123) = 27.00, p = .798$; χ^2/df ratio = .798 to .80. CFI = 1.00; RMSEA = .00, *ns*. As shown in Table 2, income and the autoregressive effect of T1 peer victimization on T2 peer victimization were significant. Main effects of parental facilitation and coaching did not emerge. Although peer acceptance predicted lower levels of peer victimization over time, peer acceptance did not moderate associations linking parental facilitation or social coaching with peer victimization.

DISCUSSION

The present study investigated whether young adolescents' peer status moderated associations linking two forms of peer-related parenting (facilitation and social coaching) with changes in peer adjustment across the transition to middle school. Study aims were tested using a multi-informant, longitudinal design. Consistent with hypotheses, peer acceptance moderated the prospective associations linking parental facilitation and social coaching with young adolescents' friendship quality and loneliness; no effects emerged for peer victimization. Findings revealed two different patterns of associations, supportive of the goodness-of-fit model and perhaps reflective of the different roles of facilitation and social coaching (Ladd & Pettit, 2002; Mounts, 2008). Parental facilitation predicted better friendship quality and lower levels of loneliness across the middle school transition among well-accepted youth, but not among low-accepted youth. In contrast, parental social coaching predicted better friendship quality among low-accepted youth, but lower friendship quality among well-accepted youth.

The benefits of parental facilitation in the present study are consistent with findings from Vernberg and colleagues (1993, 2006) in which parental facilitation promoted greater friendship intimacy and companionship among a community sample of re-located

adolescents. Re-located adolescents may have no established peer status (neither high nor low), and facilitation may simply offer them opportunities to meet peers and make friends. The present study extends this finding, suggesting that during the transition to middle school in a community sample of non-relocated youth, facilitation may be particularly instrumental in furthering peer adjustment among *well-accepted* youth. Compared with low-accepted youth, youth who were well-accepted before the middle school transition may have had an easier time meeting new peers and potentially more social opportunities in which to benefit from parental facilitation. Parents' provisions of opportunities to spend time with peers may help well-liked youth to maintain or develop friendships by using their existing social skills and established relationships as a springboard (Parker et al., 2006), thus, promoting friendship quality and reducing loneliness.

However, for low-accepted youth, facilitation did not predict friendship quality or loneliness. These youth may be less likely to benefit from parental facilitation because they may have fewer social opportunities (or may be less apt) to take advantage of parental facilitation. Additionally, parental facilitation may not provide these youth with the skills to effectively interact with peers. That is, even if parents provide social opportunities, low-accepted youth may still have difficulties successfully engaging with their peers (Bierman, 2004), perhaps feeling less socially competent and intimidated in social interactions. Therefore, peer adjustment may not improve across the middle school transition for these youth despite parents' efforts.

In contrast to the findings with parental facilitation, parental social coaching predicted better friendship quality among low-accepted youth, but lower friendship quality among well-accepted youth. These findings suggest that low-accepted youth may stand to gain more from specific guidance or strategies from parents about how to cope with peer problems. The prosocial strategies that low-accepted youth learn from parents about how to handle peer stressors, such as exclusion, could also be used by these youth to manage problems in the context of friendships, thus promoting their friendship quality. It is also possible that prosocial parental coaching promotes social skill development, which in turn may allow for more positive peer interactions. Indeed, among young children, mothers who reported and were observed to use more prosocial strategies in hypothetical peer problem situations had children who were rated as more socially competent (Finnie & Russell, 1988; Mize & Pettit, 1997). Further, intervention work with children with ADHD revealed improvements in youth peer liking after parents received friendship coaching training (Mikami, Lerner, et al., 2010).

In contrast, parental social coaching predicted lower friendship quality among well-accepted youth, which is not inconsistent with findings in the literature (McDowell et al., 2003; McDowell & Parke, 2009). Among well-accepted youth, social coaching may be unnecessary or intrusive, yielding unintended effects, because these youth may be better equipped to effectively manage peer problems compared to their counterparts. Given the present study's innovation examining both parenting and youth outcomes in the peer domain, replication of this association and further research are needed to clarify why parental social coaching may yield unintended effects for well-accepted youth, even after accounting for pre-transition friendship quality.

Findings of Parenting x Peer Acceptance interactions in the present study support the goodness-of-fit model, or the notion of “custom-fit parenting,” as well as findings in the temperament literature (e.g., Kochanska, 1995, 1997), and suggest that unique dimensions of peer-related parenting are differentially effective for low- versus well-accepted youth. Specifically, well-accepted youth may be able to capitalize on parental facilitation of peer interactions, perhaps because they are generally well-liked with established relationships that afford them more social opportunities. In contrast, low-accepted youth are at a social disadvantage and may require parental support in the form of social coaching to equip them with the skills to improve their peer relationships. The different pattern of associations also reflects the different functions of parental facilitation (i.e., role as a mediator) and social coaching (i.e., role as a consultant) and the contexts in which they may be utilized (Ladd & Pettit, 2002; Mounts, 2008).

Parental facilitation and social coaching did not predict change in peer victimization across the transition to middle school. However, peer acceptance predicted lower peer victimization over time. Peer victimization often occurs at school (Hong & Espelage, 2012), and thus parents (compared with peers) may not be in the best position to reduce peer victimization (e.g., Hodges, Boivin, Vitaro, & Bukowski, 1999). Additionally, in the present study, social coaching about peer exclusion, a more common and normative peer challenge, rather than social coaching about peer victimization was assessed, which is another potential reason for the null effects. Given the high rates of peer victimization during the middle school years (Robers et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2009), future studies should consider parenting strategies specifically targeted at reducing peer victimization.

There are several limitations to the present study and directions for future work. On average, youth were relatively well-adjusted and had parents who were involved in their peer relationships. Findings may not generalize to youth with more severe peer problems or who have more disengaged parents. Future studies should consider how parental facilitation and social coaching might benefit youth who experience more pervasive peer problems, given evidence of the social advantages of positive parenting in clinical samples (Mikami, Jack, et al., 2010; Mikami, Lerner, et al., 2010). Further, other approaches to examining parental coaching, such as considering parents' inclination to intervene, real-time versus hypothetical assessments, coaching about different types of peer challenges, and assessing behavioral and cognitive framing strategies separately, are needed to better conceptualize social coaching and improve understanding of associations with youth adjustment. Additionally, in light of different patterns of results found for the two types of parenting in the present study, other forms of peer-related parenting strategies could be considered (e.g., monitoring, supervision; Mounts, 2008). Although the study used a multi-informant approach, the inclusion of young adolescents' perspective of their parents' involvement in their peer relationships should be considered (e.g., Mounts, 2007). Similarly, our use of a 2-item peer acceptance measure and an adapted friendship quality measure could be further strengthened through peer or sociometric ratings and more comprehensive assessments. Additionally, parent participation in the present study was primarily mothers. Future studies that include mothers and fathers would advance knowledge and clarify some existing inconsistencies in the literature (e.g., McDowell et al., 2003; McDowell & Parke, 2009). Lastly, although our sample size may have precluded an extensive examination of the moderating effects of gender, ethnicity, and

socioeconomic status, such investigations would be important for future studies given some findings of demographic differences in parenting and peer indices in the literature (e.g., Ladd & Pettit, 2002; Mounts, 2008).

Notwithstanding these limitations, this study had multiple strengths, including the examination of parenting and youth adjustment within the peer domain, a multi-informant approach, and longitudinal design spanning the middle school transition. Findings revealed that different parenting strategies may help youth with different peer experiences. The association linking parental facilitation with better peer adjustment was evident among well-accepted youth, whereas the benefits of parental social coaching on youth peer adjustment emerged among low-accepted youth. Although parental facilitation and social coaching are aimed at promoting positive peer relationships, they differ in their purpose (e.g., promoting positive peer interactions versus managing peer problems) and proximity (“bridge” versus outside) to the peer world. Findings extend the literature about for whom peer-related parenting may be more (or less) beneficial and may be informative for intervention.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE, APPLICATION, THEORY AND POLICY

Findings from the present study showed that low-accepted youth benefitted from parental social coaching but not parental facilitation, whereas well-accepted youth gained more from parental facilitation than social coaching. These results may have implications for interventions, cautioning against an assumption that any type of positive parenting will necessarily be equally helpful. Rather, interventions should consider the fit of parenting behaviors with child characteristics and experiences. For instance, low-accepted youth may first need guidance and advice from parents, via social coaching, to help them develop the skills to successfully interact with peers before they are able to take advantage of the social opportunities afforded by parental facilitation. For well-accepted youth, the current findings suggest that parents may help make the transition to middle school smoother, socially, by providing opportunities or permission for peer interactions. Thus, parents’ knowledge of youth peer experiences and status may be informative in helping them to determine an effective strategy. Further, parents could benefit from information about how to facilitate peer interactions and examples of prosocial and benign framing solutions for managing peer challenges. Yet, the authors caution against drawing strong conclusions about intervention implications before results of the present study are replicated. Investigations at different developmental periods would also be informative.

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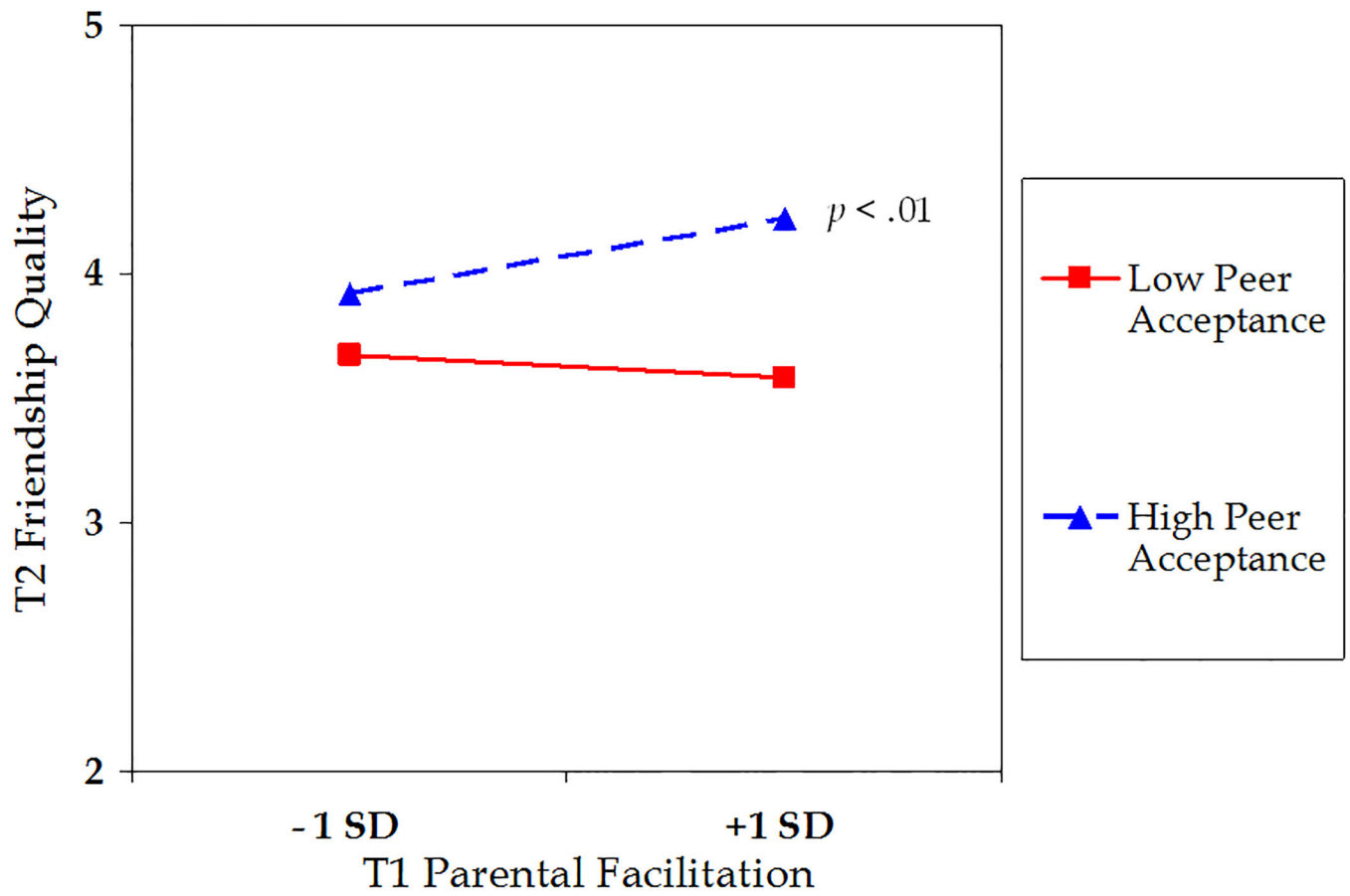


Figure 1. The association between T1 parental facilitation and T2 friendship quality at low ($-1 SD$) and high ($+1 SD$) levels of peer acceptance. The x-axis reflects values at $\pm 1 SD$ from the mean of facilitation and the y-axis reflects the range of responses on friendship quality.

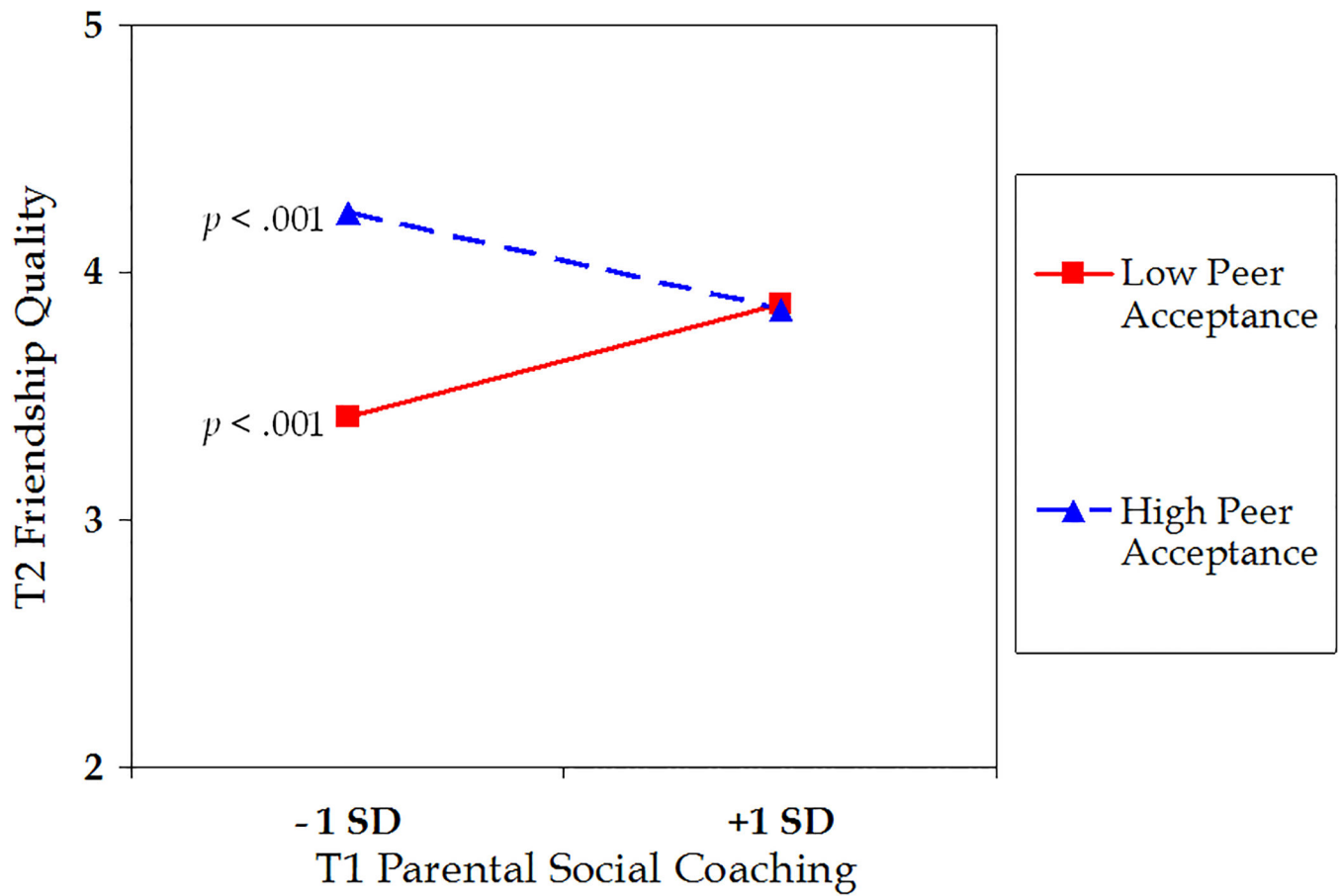


Figure 2. The association between T1 parental social coaching and T2 friendship quality at low (-1 SD) and high (+ 1 SD) levels of peer acceptance. The x-axis reflects values at +/- 1 SD from the mean of social coaching and the y-axis reflects the range of responses on friendship quality.

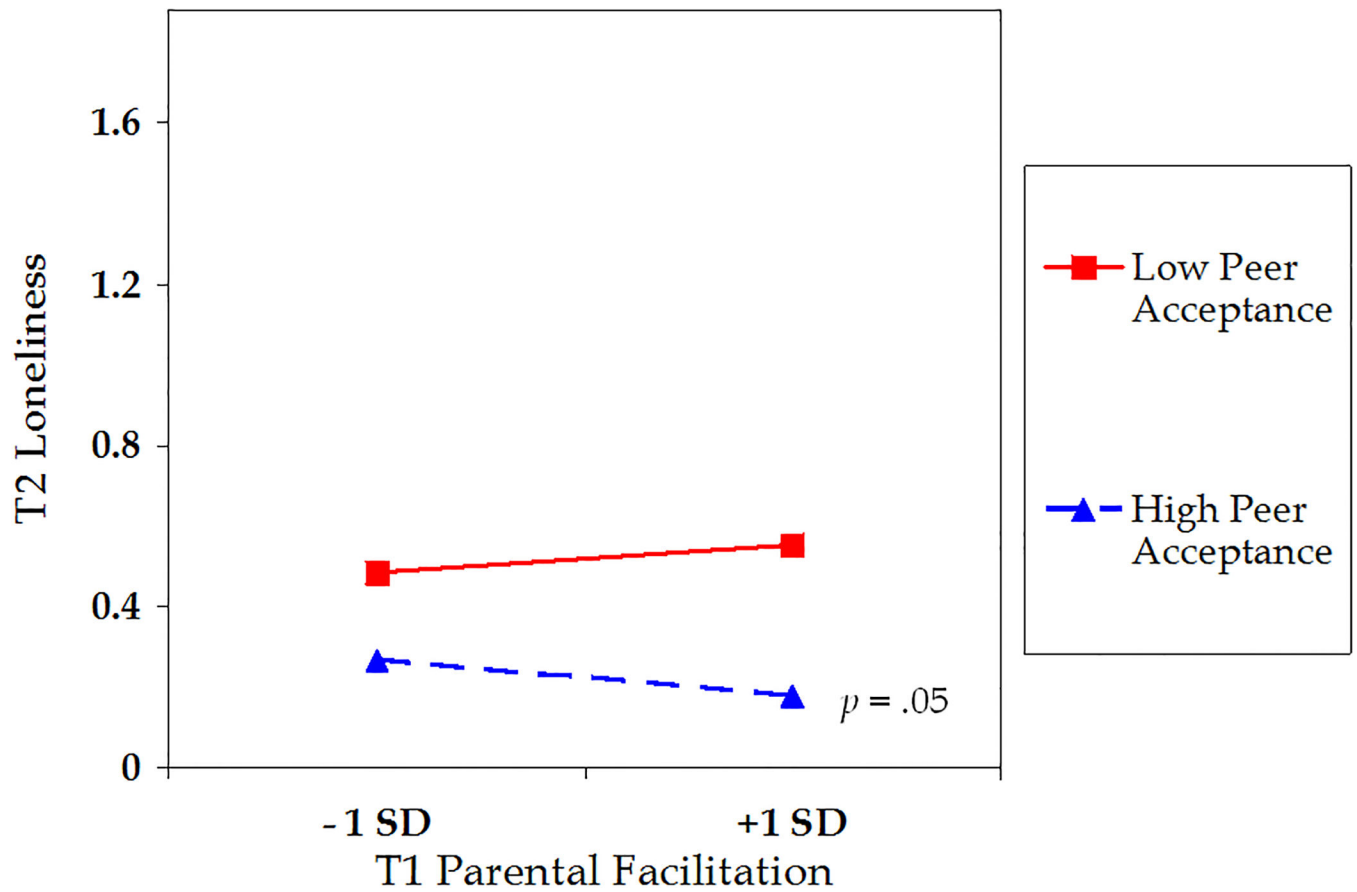


Figure 3. The association between T1 parental facilitation and T2 loneliness at low (-1 SD) and high (+1 SD) levels of peer acceptance. The x-axis reflects values at +/- 1 SD from the mean of facilitation and the y-axis reflects the range of responses on loneliness.

TABLE 1
 Descriptive Statistics and Correlations among Parenting Behaviors, Peer Acceptance, and Peer Adjustment

	1	2	3	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. T1 Facilitation	-								
2. T1 Social coaching	.20*	-							
3. T1 Peer acceptance	.16	.17	-						
5. T1 Friendship quality	.09	-.04	.33**	-					
6. T1 Loneliness	-.00	.07	-.37***	-.46***	-				
7. T1 Peer victimization	.04	-.05	-.27**	-.27**	.47***	-			
8. T2 Friendship quality	.21*	-.01	.49***	.54***	-.32**	-.19	-		
9. T2 Loneliness	-.11	.05	-.61***	-.41***	.62***	.43***	-.49***	-	
10. T2 Peer victimization	.04	.13	-.33**	-.33**	.47***	.68***	-.25**	.49***	-
<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	2.47 (.75)	2.39 (.72)	4.05 (.92)	4.07 (.74)	.33 (.32)	2.03 (.89)	4.08 (.69)	.29 (.31)	1.98 (.86)
<i>Range</i>	.85-4.00	1.00-4.00	1.50-5.00	1.13-5.00	.00-1.56	1.00-4.43	2.00-5.00	0.00-1.88	1.00-4.86

Note. T1 = data collected at Time 1; T2 = data collected at Time 2.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

Unstandardized and Standardized Regression Coefficients for the Independent and Interactive Effects of Parental Facilitation, Social Coaching, and Peer Acceptance Predicting Change in Three Separate Indices of Peer Adjustment

TABLE 2

	Peer adjustment			
	T2 Friendship quality	T2 Loneliness	T2 Peer victimization	
	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)	β
Step 1: T1 Controls				
Gender	.36 (.11)**	-.16 (.05)***	-.08 (.13)	-.05
Race/ethnicity	.10 (.13)	.03 (.06)	.22 (.15)	.12
Age	.24 (.09)**	-.11 (.04)*	-.03 (.10)	-.02
Income	.08 (.04)*	.002 (.020)	.14 (.05)**	.25***
Peer adjustment	.43 (.07)***	.66 (.08)***	.70 (.07)***	.72***
R ²	35.4%			50.4%
Step 2: T1 Main effects				
Facilitation	.13 (.08)	-.04 (.04)	-.004 (.085)	-.003
Social coaching	-.01 (.08)	.02 (.04)	.11 (.09)	.09
R ² / R ²	37.0%/1.6%			45.6%/0.4%
Step 3: T1 Moderator				
Peer acceptance	.25 (.06)***	-.16 (.03)***	-.22 (.07)**	-.25***
R ² / R ²	46.7%/9.7%			59.7%/14.1%
Step 4: T1 Interactions				
Facilitation x Peer acceptance	.15 (.07)*	-.07 (.04)*	.11 (.09)	.08
Social coaching x Peer acceptance	-.35 (.08)***	.07 (.04)	-.01 (.10)	-.01
R ² / R ²	60.1%/13.4%			63.7%/4.0%

Note. T1 = data collected at Time 1; T2 = data collected at Time 2; Gender coded as 0 = male, 1 = female; race/ethnicity coded as 0 = European American, 1 = minority. Separate models were fitted for each outcome.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.