

# Parental monitoring and school motivation in French-Canadian adolescents: A three-year transactional model

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## Abstract

**Goal:** Verify the contribution of three aspects of parental monitoring to adolescents' intrinsic motivation for school during high school years.

**Design:** Three repeated measurements, one year apart, analyzed with SEM.

**Participants:** 434 students from public secondary schools in Québec, Canada.

**Key findings:** (1) Parental solicitation consistently predicts increases in adolescent disclosure. (2) Both parental solicitation and parental control predict adolescent motivation, but not consistently.

**Practical implications:** A combination of parental solicitation and structuring control may contribute to adolescents' maintaining intrinsic motivation toward school during high school years.

## Background

- Middle adolescence is a critical period for maintenance of school motivation<sup>1</sup>. A lack of motivation may lead to school dropout<sup>2</sup>.
- Parents maintain a strong influence during adolescence<sup>3</sup> and may help prevent a decrease in school motivation.
- The multidimensional concept of **parental monitoring** is promising to adolescents' motivation.
- Parental control** → Enforcing rules about adolescent activities, requiring permissions.
- Parental solicitation** → Asking information from adolescent, opening the discussion.
- Adolescent disclosure** → Adolescent sharing information spontaneously and willingly.
- Certain aspects of parental monitoring buffer against maladjustment<sup>4, 5</sup>, but studies on positive adjustment-like school motivation are less common.
- Question:** Can we prevent a drop in intrinsic school motivation during adolescence by encouraging certain parental monitoring behaviors?

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Figure 1: Hypothetical model

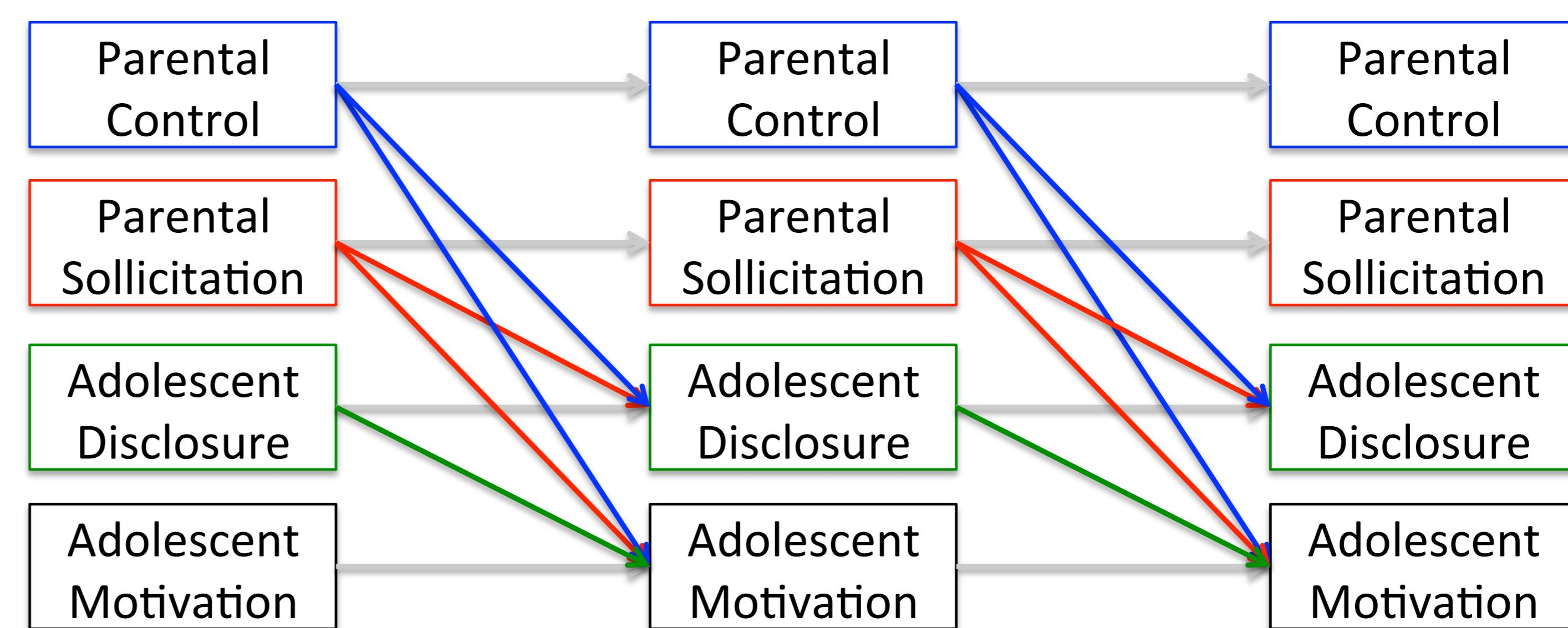
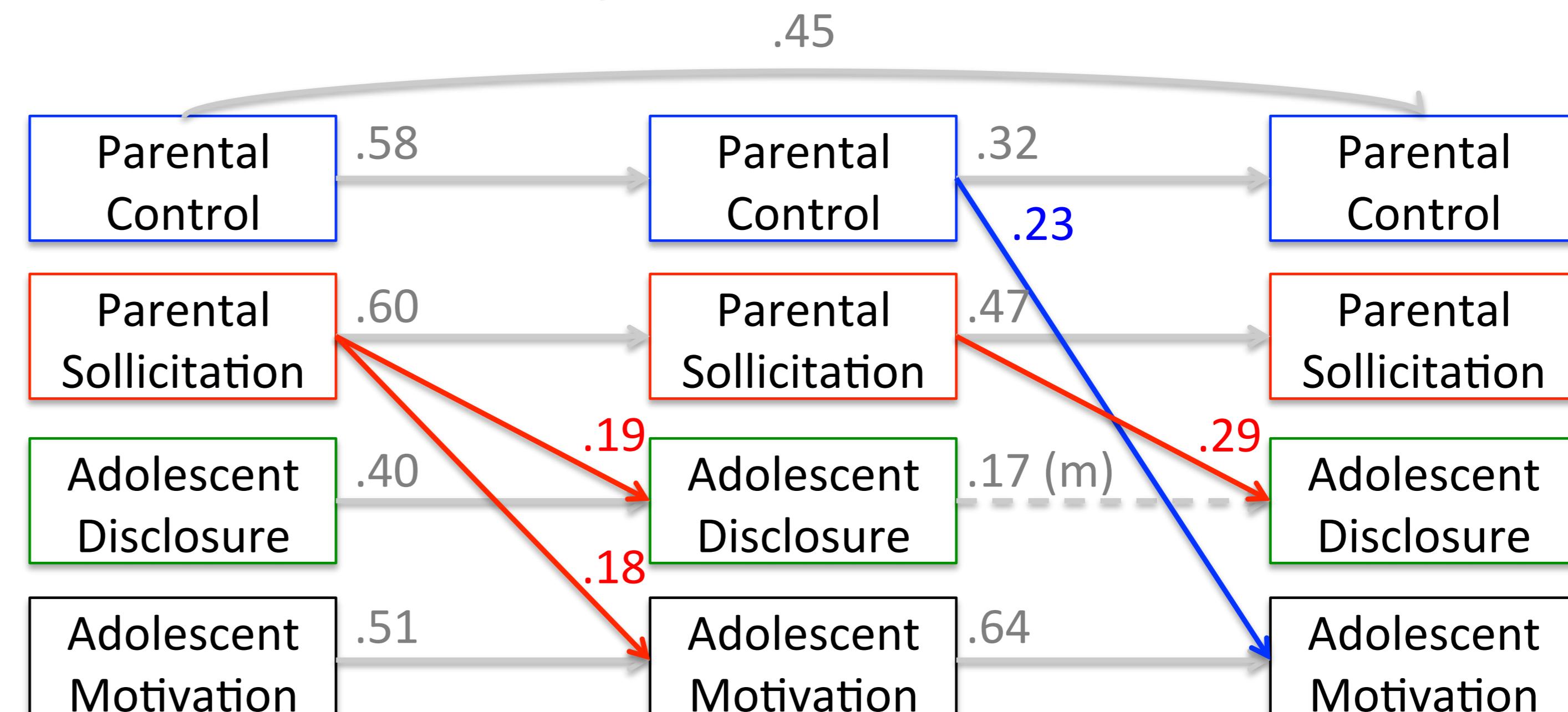


Figure 2: Final model



Significant standardized coefficients depicted; all  $p < .05$ , except dashed line (marginal).  
 $\chi^2 (39) = 53.78$ ,  $p = .06$ , RMSEA = .030, CFI = .98, TLI = .96

Correlations among concurrent measures were included in the model.

## Hypotheses

H1. Parental control → decrease in adolescent disclosure and intrinsic motivation over time.

H2. Parental solicitation → increase in adolescent disclosure and intrinsic motivation over time.

## Method

### Participants

- 434 French-speaking youth attending 2 suburban public secondary schools in Québec, Canada
- 67% females; 62% Caucasian; 78% spoke French as their 1st language
- Average of 15.9 years old at Time 1 ( $SD = 1.38$ )

### Procedure

- Computerized questionnaire administered in school
- 3rd, 4th, and 5th year of secondary school

### Measures

#### Parental monitoring<sup>6</sup>

- Parental control: 4 items,  $\alpha$  values = .77 to .87
- Parental solicitation: 3 items,  $\alpha$  values = .75 to .88
- Adolescent disclosure: 4 items,  $\alpha$  values .74 to .80

#### Intrinsic motivation<sup>7</sup>

- 12-item subscale,  $\alpha = .86$

Note:  $\alpha$ 's from validation papers.

## Analyses

- Structural equation modeling (SEM; Mplus v.7), MLR estimator
- FIML for missing data
- All variables in the model were regressed on gender for control purposes

## Results

See Figure 1 for hypothesized model. See Figure 2 for final model and fit indices (satisfactory fit was found).

**H1. Unsupported (good news):** parental control does not predict a decrease in adolescent disclosure and motivation. It even predicts an *increase* in intrinsic motivation from T2 to T3.

**H2. Mostly supported:** Parental solicitation predicts an increase in adolescent disclosure and intrinsic motivation from T1 to T2, and an increase in adolescent disclosure from T2 to T3.

## Discussion

Parental monitoring behaviors not only predict adolescent maladjustment (as shown previously) but also adjustment—i.e., intrinsic motivation for school.

Although parental control is a monitoring practice that can be detrimental to parent-child relationship for adolescents with problem behavior, it may have positive effects for adolescents who are overall well adjusted.

The increase in school motivation when parents exert control may be explained by adolescents benefiting from the structure provided by parents, and by perceiving such practice as a caring behavior.

Monitoring adolescents' life using a well-balanced combination of parental solicitation and parental control could help prevent a decrease in adolescent school motivation during the high school years.

Next steps include: Verifying if parental knowledge has a role to play in this model and verifying effects of adolescent behavior on parental behavior.

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