

Beliefs about the Cause of Positive Behaviors in Children with ASD and Links with Parent Outcomes



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Introduction

There has been a substantial amount of research aimed at understanding the contribution of the negative behaviors of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) to parent outcomes. In contrast, little is known about the link between the positive behaviors of children with ASD and parent outcomes. Parental attributions about child behavior have been shown to shape reactions to behaviors and subsequently impact parental psychological well-being and the parent-child relationship. The goal of the present study was to provide insight into parental attributions for the positive behaviors of children with ASD and their association with parental psychological well-being and closeness in the parent-child relationship.

Study Objectives

1. Identify child and parent factors related to parental attributions for the positive behaviors of children with ASD.
2. To evaluate the association between parental attributions for the positive behaviors of children with ASD and parental psychological well-being (i.e. positive and negative affect) ASD and closeness in the parent-child relationship.

Methods

Sample

- 183 couples with a child with ASD

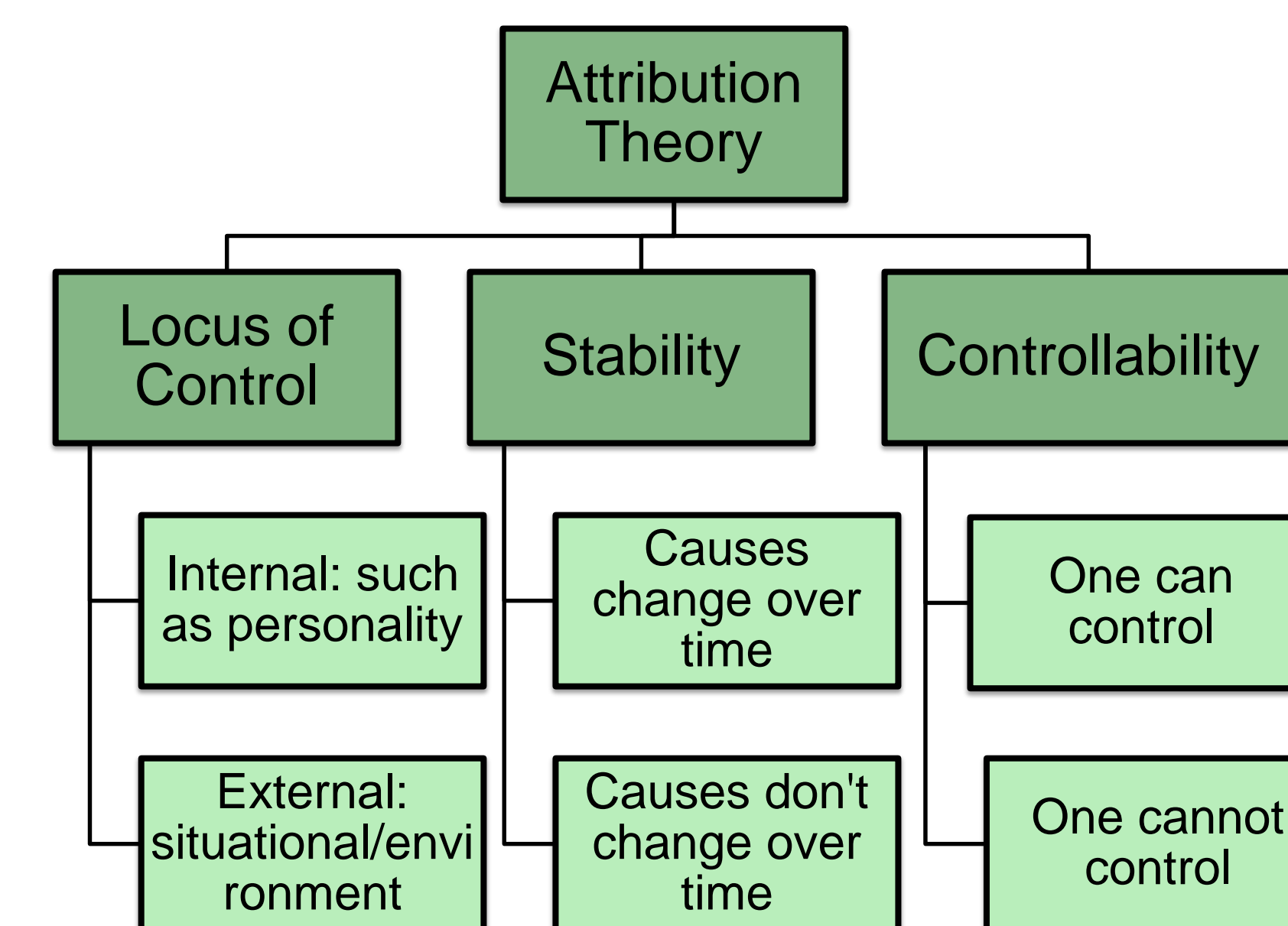
Sample Characteristics: M (SD)			
Parents		Children	
Age	39.54 (5.80)	Age	7.91 (2.25)
Household Income	\$70,000- \$79,999 (\$30,000)	Gender	85.30% male
Education	69.90% college education	Intellectual Disability	34.80%
Race/Ethnicity 89.70% White, non-Hispanic			

Measures

Parents jointly reported on their child's age, ID status, and level of functional skills. Parents independently reported on:

- Parental attributions for positive child behaviors measured by Parental Attribution Questionnaire (PAQ; Whittingham et al., 2008)
- Child behavior problems measured by Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL; Achenbach & Rescorla, 2000, 2001)
- Severity of ASD symptoms measured by Social Responsiveness Scale-Second Edition (SRS) (Constantino & Gruber, 2012)
- Child Level of functional skills measured by Adaptive Behavior Assessment System- Second Edition (ABAS-2; Harrison & Oakland, 2003)
- Positive and Negative Affect measured by the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) (Watson et al., 1988)
- Closeness in the Parent-Child Relationship measured by the Bengtson Positive Affect Index (PAI; Roberts & Bengtson, 1993)

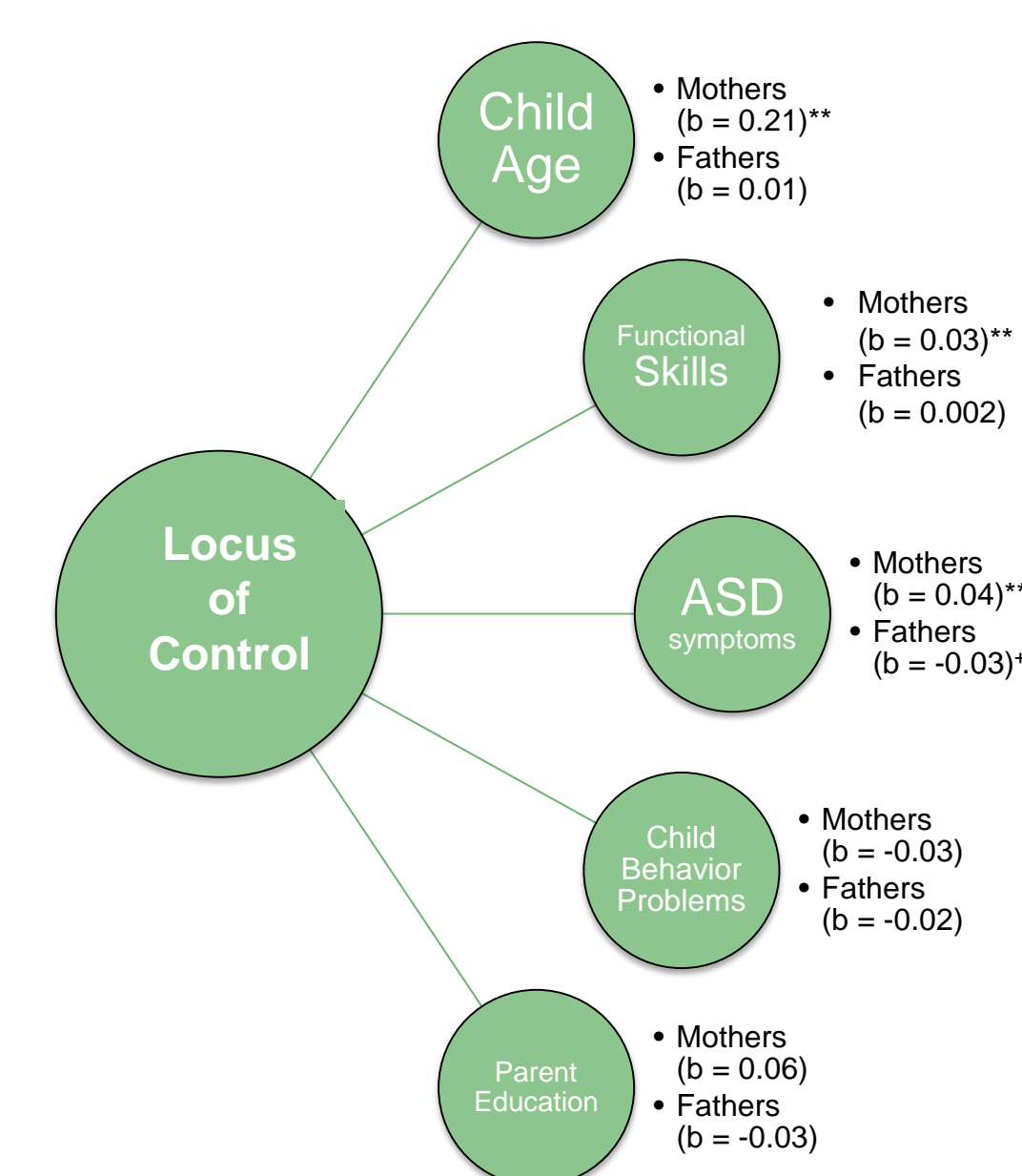
Figure 1. Attribution Dimensions



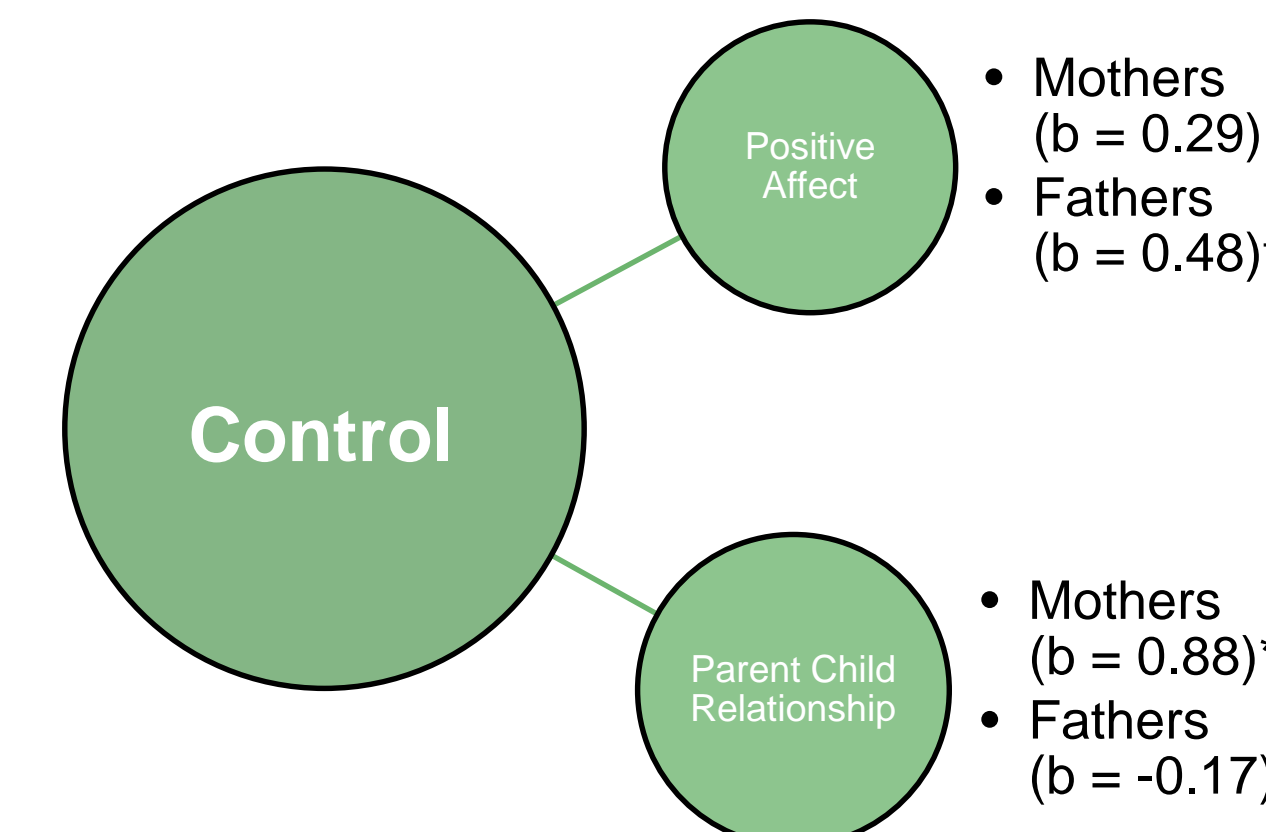
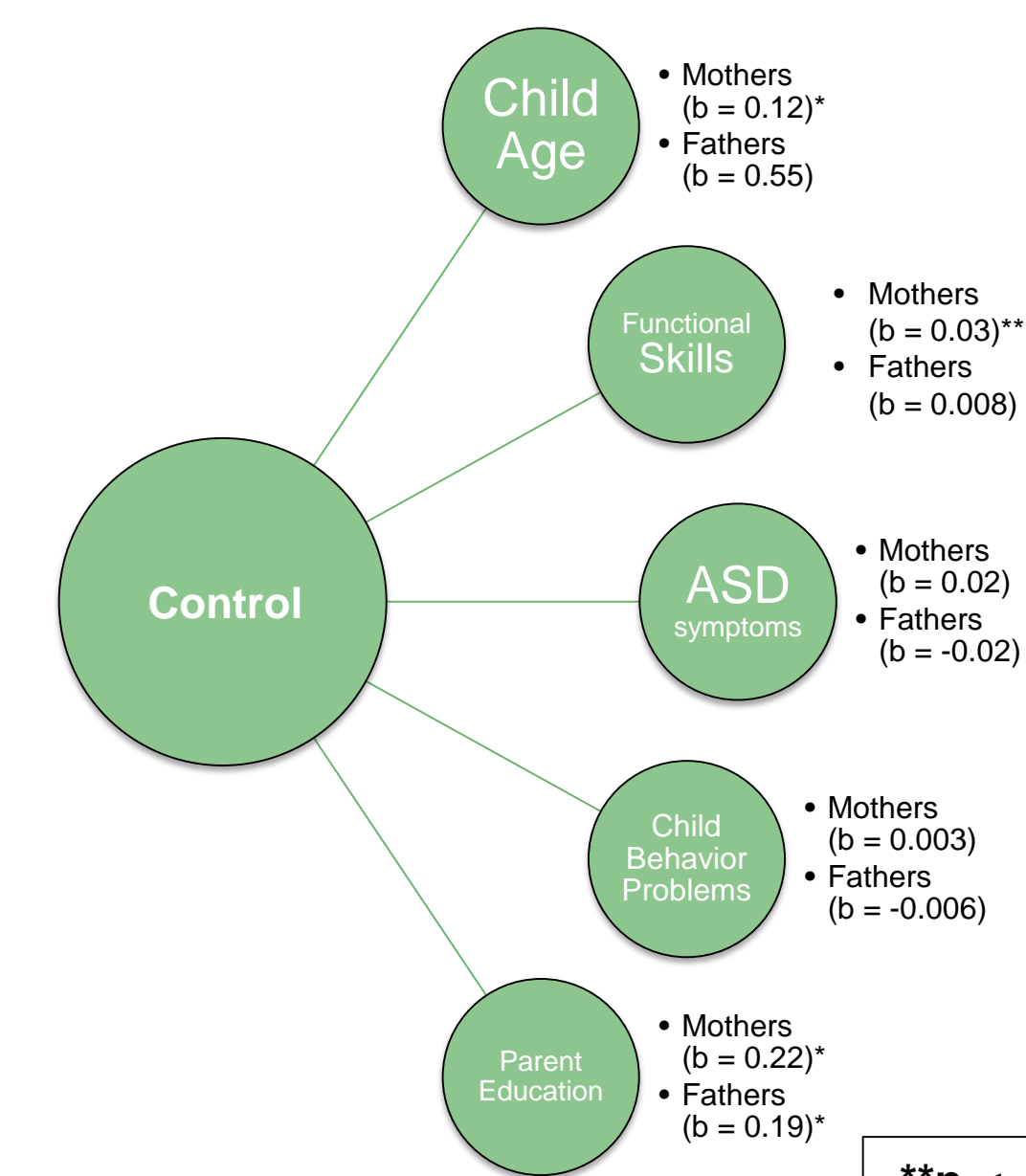
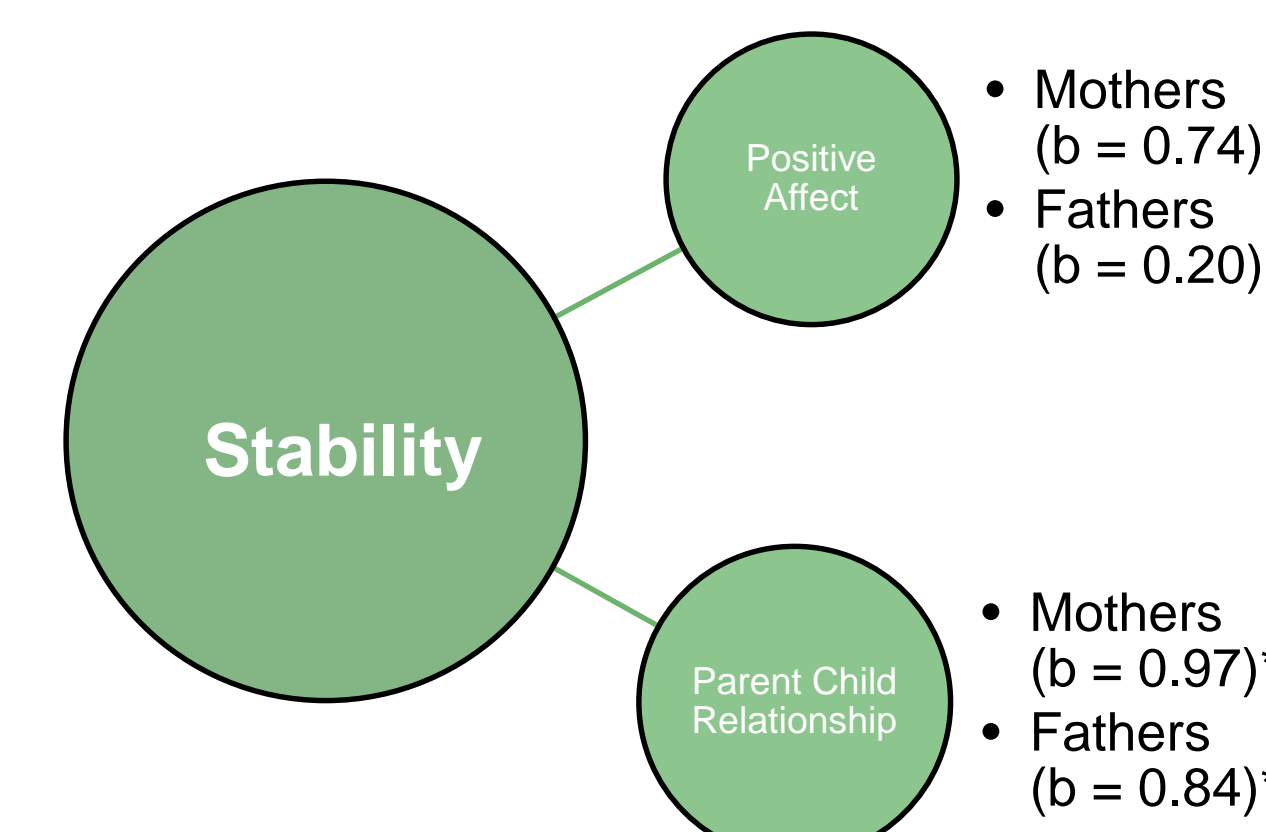
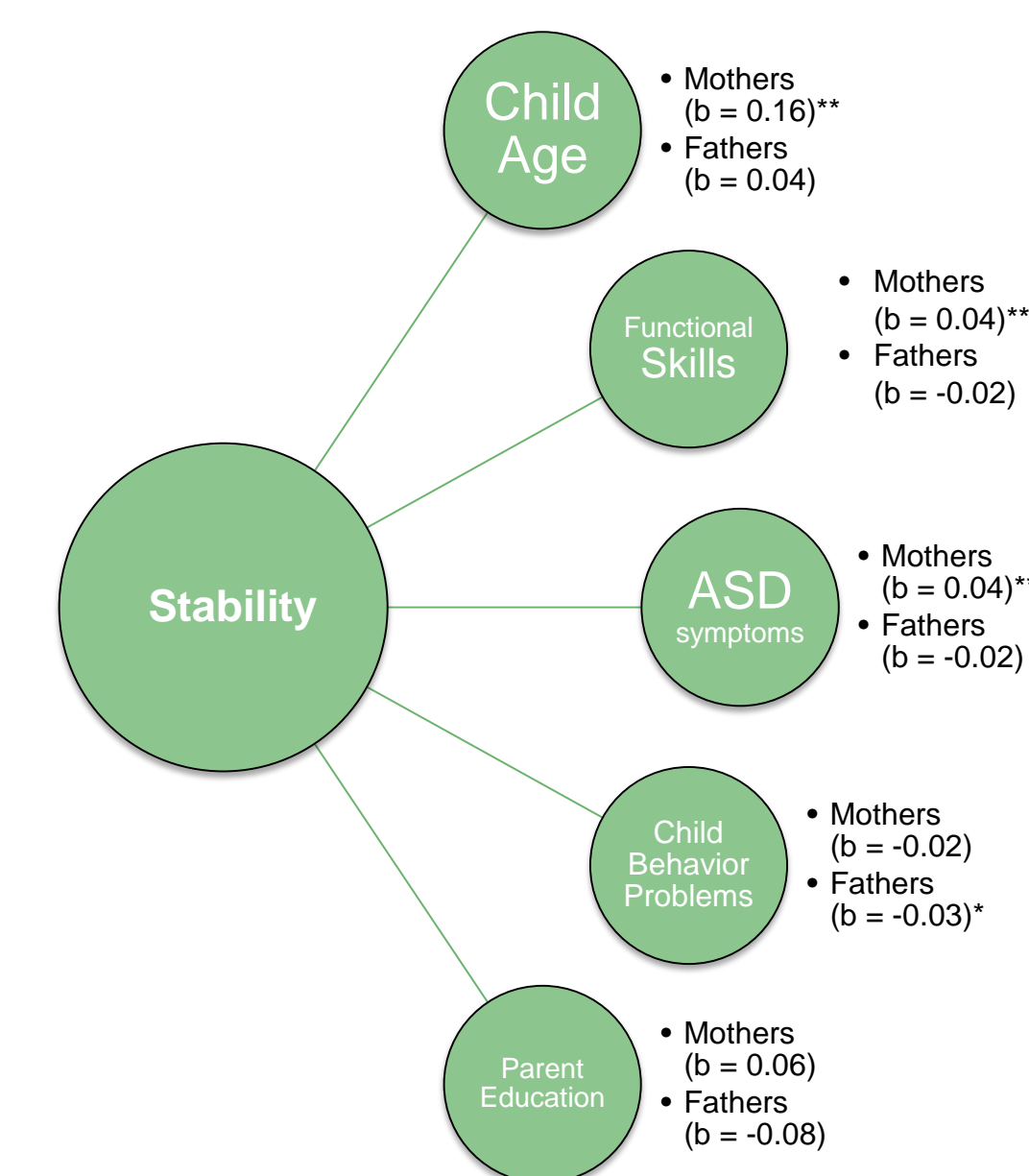
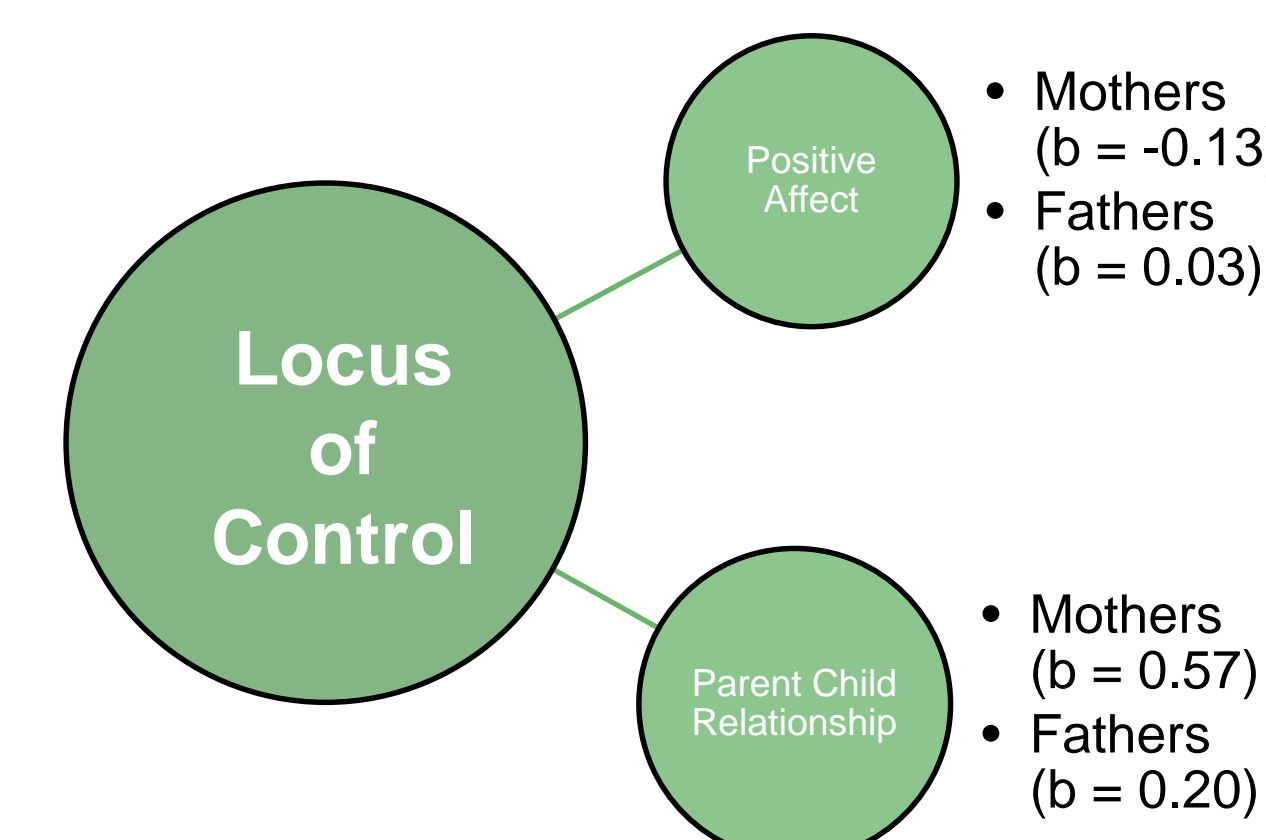
Results

Multilevel models using hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) software were conducted to account for the dependency in couple data.

Objective 1



Objective 2



**p < .01, *p < 0.05, *p < 0.10

Findings

- Mothers with a child with a higher severity of ASD symptoms → more internal and stable attributions
- Mothers with children with a higher level of functional skills → more internal child, stable, and controllable attributions
- For fathers, the child with ASD's level of global negative behavior problems was negatively related to beliefs that the child's positive behavior was caused by factors that were stable.
- Mothers and fathers with a higher level of education were more likely to believe that the child with ASD's positive behavior was due to factors controllable by the child than parents with lower levels of education.
- Parental attributions about the child with ASD's positive behavior were associated with parental positive affect and closeness in the parent-child relationship in meaningful but limited ways.

Discussion

Findings from the present study can help inform the development of interventions and supports to alter parental attributions in ways that may promote psychological well-being and closeness in the parent-child relationship. In particular, such interventions should be aimed at parents of children who are younger and who have more impairment.

Future Directions

Future studies should be geared towards understanding if different types of positive behaviors have different impacts on parental outcomes, in order to more fully understand how parental attributions can be used in interventions to promote psychological well-being and closeness in the parent-child relationship. Furthermore, studies should seek to understand the positive experiences of parents of children with ASD and how parents conceptualize the positive behaviors of their child with ASD.

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