

# Do restrictions work? Examination of the impact of parental restrictions on adolescents' online flirting with new people in 4-wave panel

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# Parental restrictions

- Regulating children's ICT usage by rules, limits, bans
  - E.g., rules about appropriate time spent online, activities (social media usage, rules for sharing information, interacting with others) (Clark, 2011; Ho et al, 2019)
  - Do's and don't's of ICT usage (Speno & Halliwell, 2021)
- Popular parental mediation strategy
- Present in one way or another in most parental mediation classifications





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# Sexting and flirting

- **Sexting:** messages of sexual nature, often measured by items asking about sexually explicit content (Barrense-Dias et al., 2017)
- **Flirting:** sexually loaded interaction with prospect of becoming partners
  - “Flirtation is inherently interactional. It expresses sexual interest, declaring the beginnings of sexual pursuit and demanding some sort of response” (O’Farrell et al., 2003, p. 663)
  - Not necessarily (sexually) explicit
- **Active:** sending
- **Passive:** receiving
- Other types: relational, reactive, forced, violent (Dodaj & Sesar, 2020)





# Sexting and flirting and restrictions

- **Sending sexts** (Cucci et al., 2024)
  - Rules on time: **no association**
  - Rules on content: **negative association** to sending sexts (and positive to sexting risk perception)
- **Sending and receiving sexts** (Corcoran et al., 2022)
  - Restrictive mediation **negatively associated** with sending and receiving sexts
- **Sending sexts and perceived risks** (Confalonieri et al., 2020)
  - Parental rule-setting about content **negatively associated** with sexting (slightl stronger effect for girls)
  - and with sexting risk perception (only among boys)
- **Mobile sexting (sending and receiving)** (Campbell & Park, 2014)
  - Parental supervision (combination of restrictions and monitoring): **no association**

No  
longitudinal  
study

A large blue hexagon graphic containing the text "No longitudinal study".



# Sexting and flirting and restrictions

- **What effect we would expect?**
- Sexting commonly viewed as risky activity by parents (Fix et al., 2021)
  - Actual harms depend on the specific type
  - Especially consensual vs. coerced sexting (Klettke et al., 2019; Lebedíková et al., 2024)
- In our study: online flirting with previously unknown people
  - Interactions with „online strangers“ also commonly perceived as risky (Mascheroni et al., 2014)
- We expect that parents would see this activity as potentially harmful, thus it would be restricted
- Hypothesis: **parental restrictions decrease adolescents' engagement in online flirting with people met online**

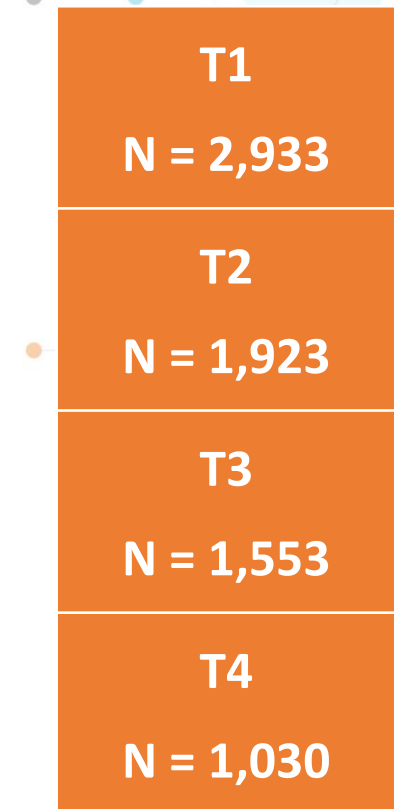
A large, solid orange hexagon is positioned on the right side of the slide. It is surrounded by a network of light blue and grey lines and dots, suggesting a digital or technological theme. The text "Gender as moderator" is centered within the hexagon in a white, sans-serif font.

Gender as  
moderator



# Method

- Online survey collected by research agency in Czechia (Stemmark)
- Parent-adolescent dyads
- Four waves, six months apart (T1: spring 2021)
- Quotas in T1 ensuring sample representative of Czech households (SES, region, municipality size) and equal representation of girls/boys in ages 11-16
- **Sample:**
  - Adolescents (age  $M = 13.4$ ,  $SD = 1.7$ , 50.1% males, in T1)
  - Parents (age  $M = 43.4$ ,  $SD = 5.9$ , 67.6% mothers, in T1)



# Measures: Online flirting

- **Passive flirting**
- How often, during conversation with unknown people online, did you experience following:
  - (1) *They flirt with me or try to flirt with me,*
  - (2) *They send me sexually loaded content (photos, messages, solicitations),*
  - (3) *They want me to send sexually loaded content (photos, messages, solicitations) to them.*
- **Active flirting** (same items, reworded)

(1) never to (6) always

Variable	T1	T2	T3	T4
Passive, %	25.8	19.5	21.8	21.1
Active, %	14.7	11.2	13.1	12.6



# Measures: Restrictions

- **Adolescents' version**
- (1) *They give me rules about what information not to share on the internet*
- (2) *They limit the time I can spend online*
- (3) *They forbid me from doing some things online (e.g., play some games, use social networking sites)*
- (4) *They give me rules about when I have to turn off the computer or telephone*
- **Parent's version** (same items, reworded)
- Parents:  $\omega = .83-.85$ , adolescents:  $\omega = .83-.84$ ; across waves
- Longitudinal invariance on the metric level

(1) very untrue to (5) very true

Variable	T1	T2	T3	T4
Restrictions – adolescent, M (SD)	3.11 (1.15)	3.12 (1.13)	3.07 (1.14)	3.03 (1.12)
Restrictions – parent, M (SD)	3.28 (1.16)	3.29 (1.13)	3.17 (1.15)	3.11 (1.16)

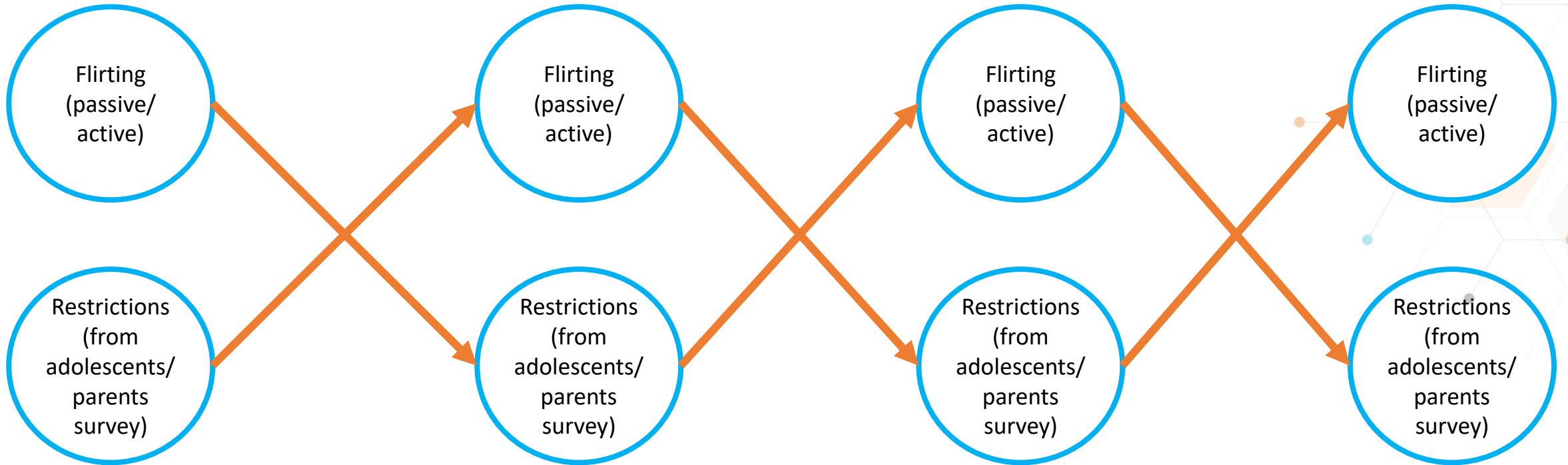




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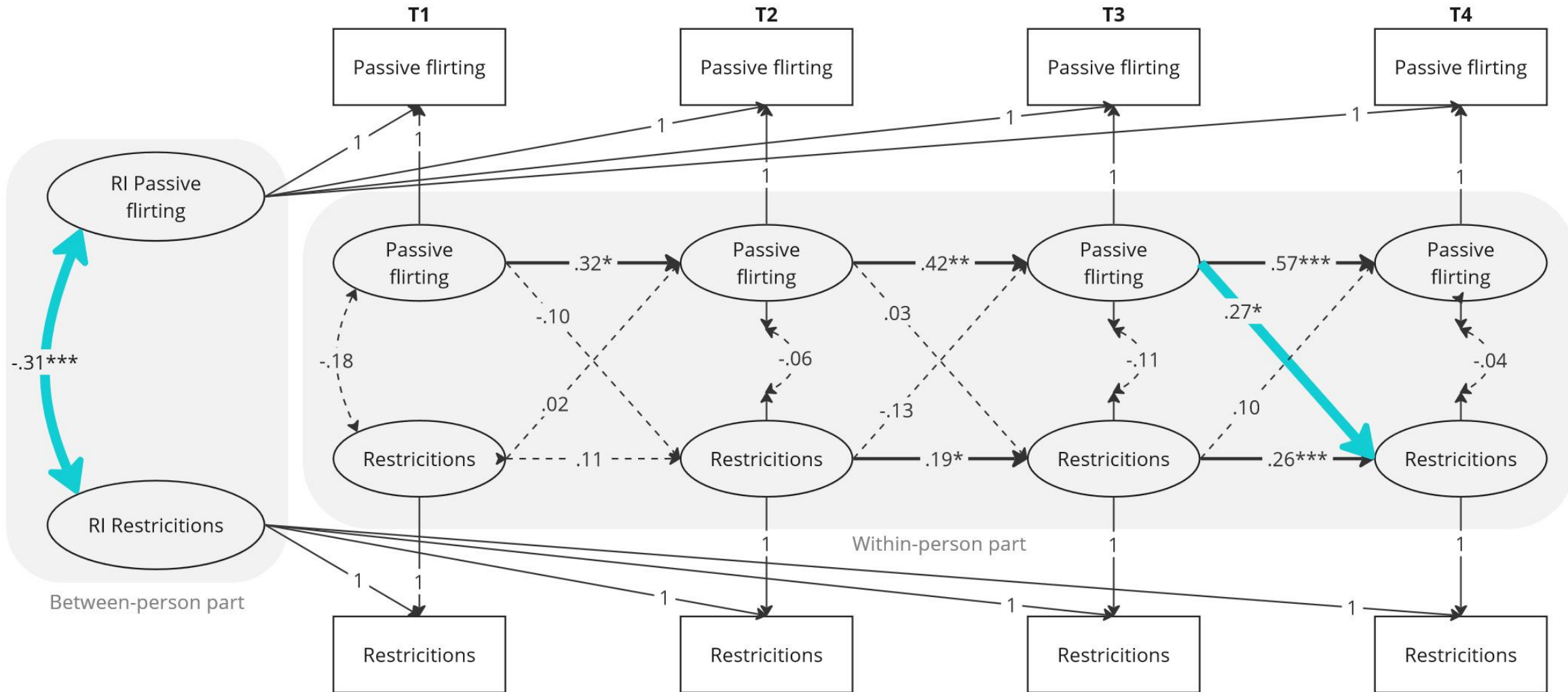
# Analysis

- RI-CLPM with WLSMV



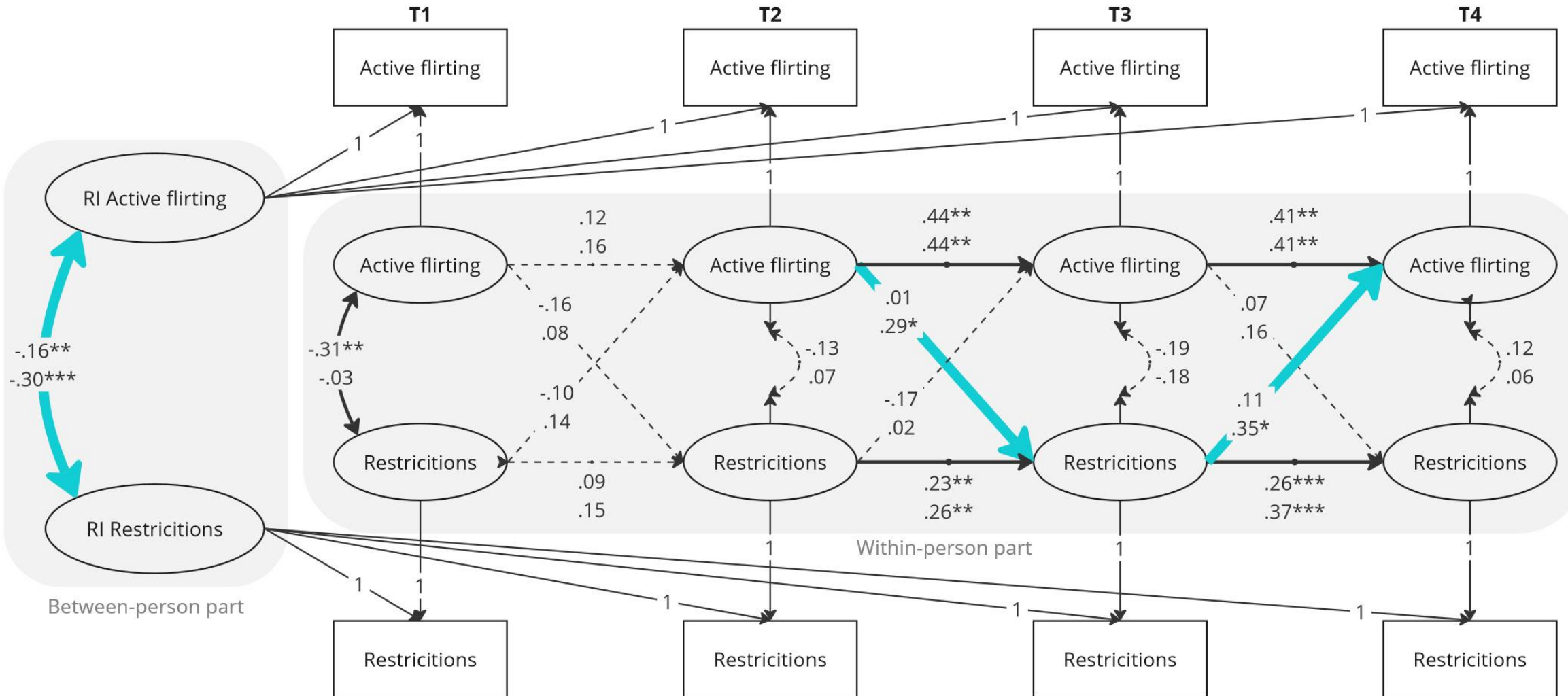
# Results: passive flirting

Adolescents' and parents' reports: essentially same



# Results: active flirting

Adolescents' reports: first estimate  
 Parental reports: second estimate





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# Discussion

- Boys and girls not different from each other
- Higher restrictions associated to lower active and passive online flirting on between-person level
  - i.e., they correlate – similar effects as in existing cross-sectional studies
- Cross-lagged paths mostly non-significant
  - Some paths significant, but not stable across waves/models
  - Bidirectional effects: online flirting can be affected by parental restrictions and restrictions can be affected by adolescents' online flirting
  - Possible backfiring effect
- Effects for active flirting only significant when restrictions assessed by parents





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# Discussion

- Does it mean that restrictions do not „work“?
  - We only assumed that online flirting with unknown people would be a „don't“ and we measured only general restrictions
  - More specific behavior could be targeted instead (for restrictions as well as for activities: what kind of messages are sent, what adolescents know about the recipient)
  - Other causes: other parental mediation practices, controlling parenting style
- More (longitudinal) research needed





# Thank you for your attention

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