Parental mediation and disputes about adolescent's online use

Longitudinal relation of restrictive and active mediation and media-related conflict across four waves in adolescence

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The data described/study is from the project „Research of Excellence on Digital Technologies and Wellbeing CZ.02.01.01/00/22_008/0004583“ which is co-financed by the European Union.

Co-funded by the European Union

14th Conference of the Media Psychology Division (DGPs), 10. – 12.09.2025, Duisburg, Germany

Parental Mediation and conflict

Parental mediation (Clark, 2011; Kirwil, 2009; Reich et al., 2025)

- *Restrictive mediation:* rules and limits for online time, content and/or activities
- *Active mediation:* parent-child discussion about media experiences to stimulate critical thinking

Media-related conflict

- Parent-child dyadic events with overt behavioral opposition (Laursen et al., 1998) related to children's media-use

Adolescence

- Autonomy becomes more important in early adolescence (11-13 years; Silverberg & Steinberg, 1987; Zimmer-Gembeck & Collins, 2006)
- Restrictive mediation might conflict with the desire for autonomy (Mesch, 2006)

Relationship of parental mediation and conflict

Effect from parental mediation on (media-related) conflict

- No longitudinal research has analyzed the relationships between these concepts
- Restrictive mediation positively associated with conflict directly (Martins et al., 2019; Mesch, 2006; Valkenburg et al., 2013) or as a moderator (Yang & Zhang, 2021), but not in all studies (Beyens & Valkenburg, 2019)
- Mixed findings for active mediation and conflict (Beyens & Valkenburg, 2019; Martins et al., 2019; Valkenburg et al., 2013)

➥ **Restrictive mediation:** more conflict (H1a), **active mediation:** less conflict (H1b)

Effect from media-related conflict on parental mediation

- Not researched so far
- Escalation in media-related conflict could lead parents to implement more restrictive mediation (limit media use) and more active mediation (raise awareness on online risks)

➥ **Media-related conflict:** more restrictive and more active mediation (H2)

Sample

- Four-wave longitudinal survey of Czech adolescents and one of their parents/guardians, representative for Czech households with children
- Online survey 2021 to 2022, every six months
- Waves: T1 = 2,933, T2 = 1,923, T3 = 1,533, T4 = 1,030
- Adolescents (T1): 11–16, *M* = 13.44, *SD* = 1.74 years,
  49.9% girls, 50.1% boys

Measures

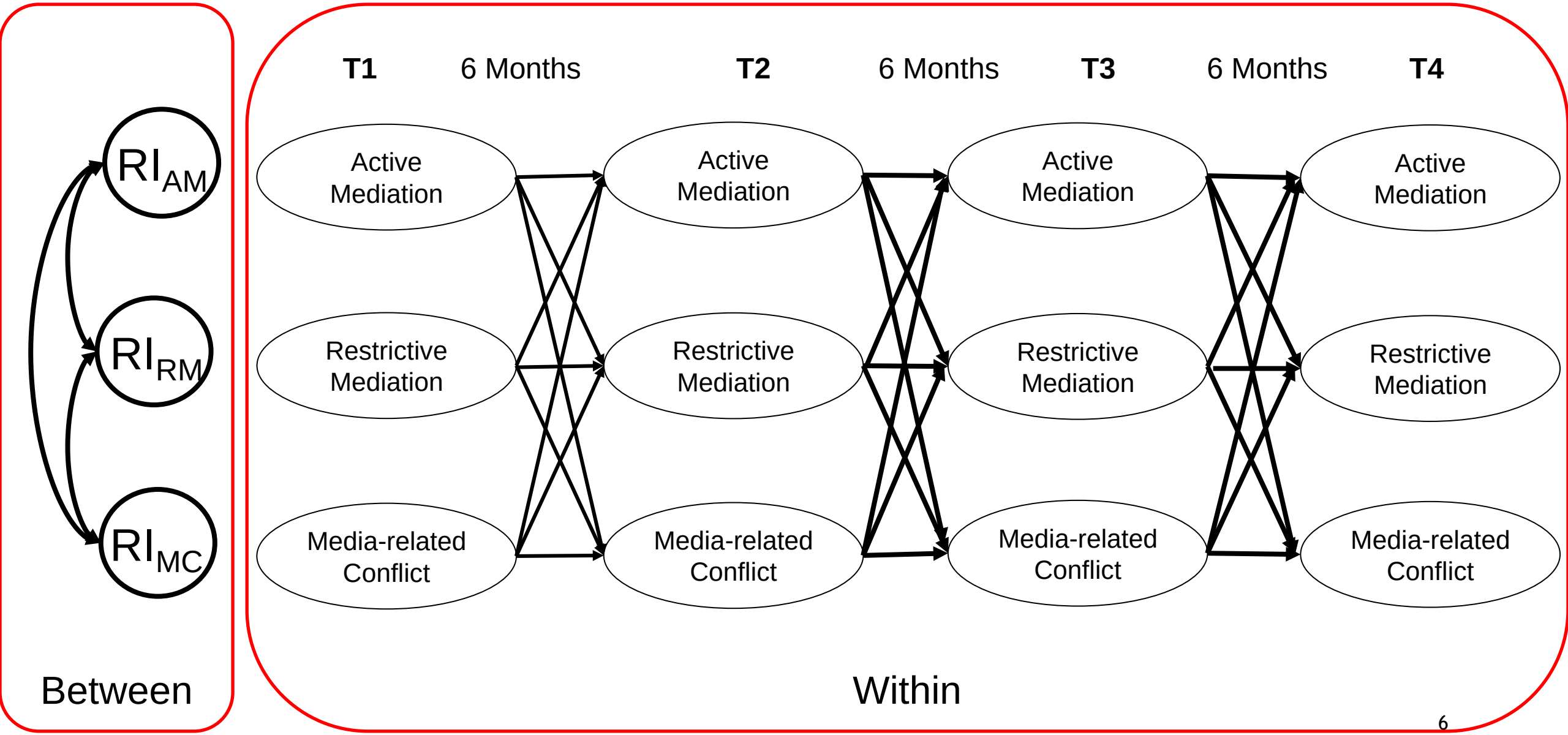
Parental Mediation (adolescent- and parent-reported)

Restrictive / Active Mediation, 4 items each, 1 (very untrue) to 5 (very true) in the last six months, newly developed / adapted from EU Kids Online IV project (Smahel et al., 2020)
Restrictive Mediation (e.g., “They limit the time I can spend online”, adolescents: .87 < ω < .90, parents: .88 < ω < .90) and
Active Mediation (e.g., “They suggests ways to use the internet safely”, adolescents: .85 < ω < .89, parents: .85 < ω < .86)

Media-related conflict (parent-reported)

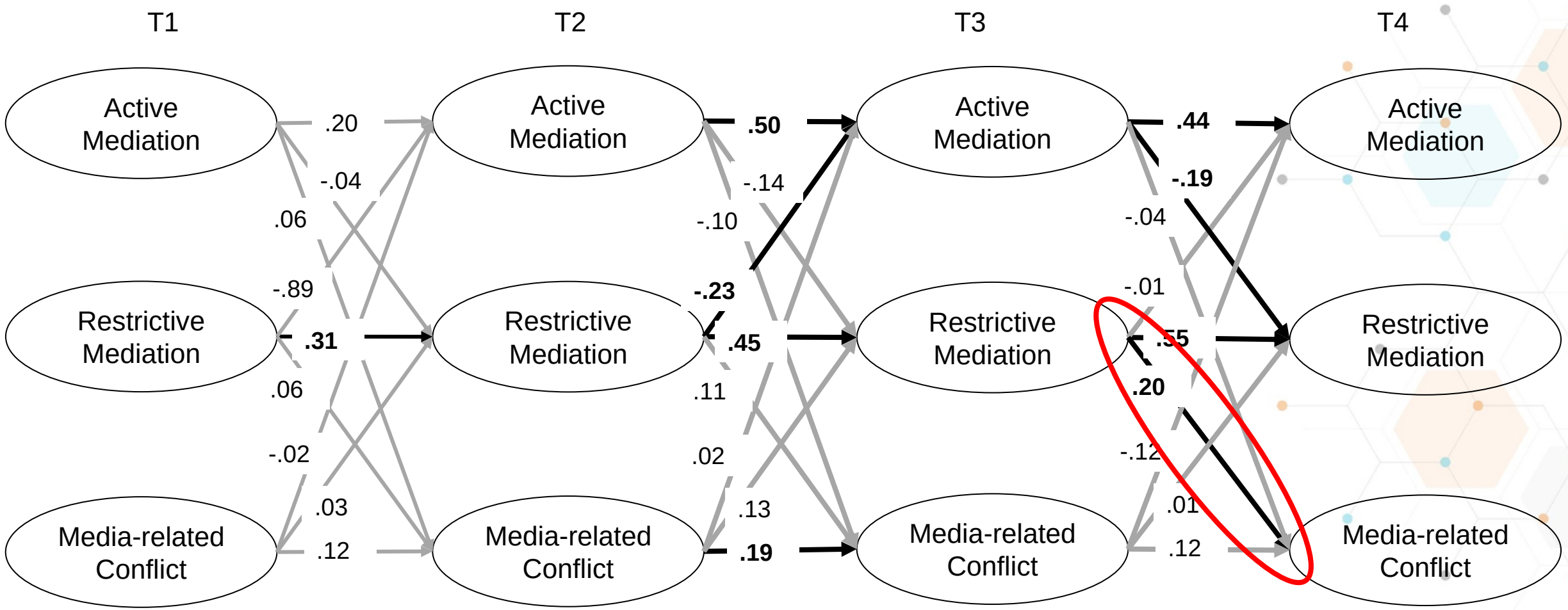
3 newly developed items, 1 (never) to 6 (several times a day), frequency of quarrel with adolescents about their media use in the last six months (e.g., “Because of how much time he/she spends on the Internet or with technology”, parents: .83 < ω < .87)

Random intercept cross-lagged panel model (RI-CLPM; Hamaker et al., 2015)



Results: Within-person part

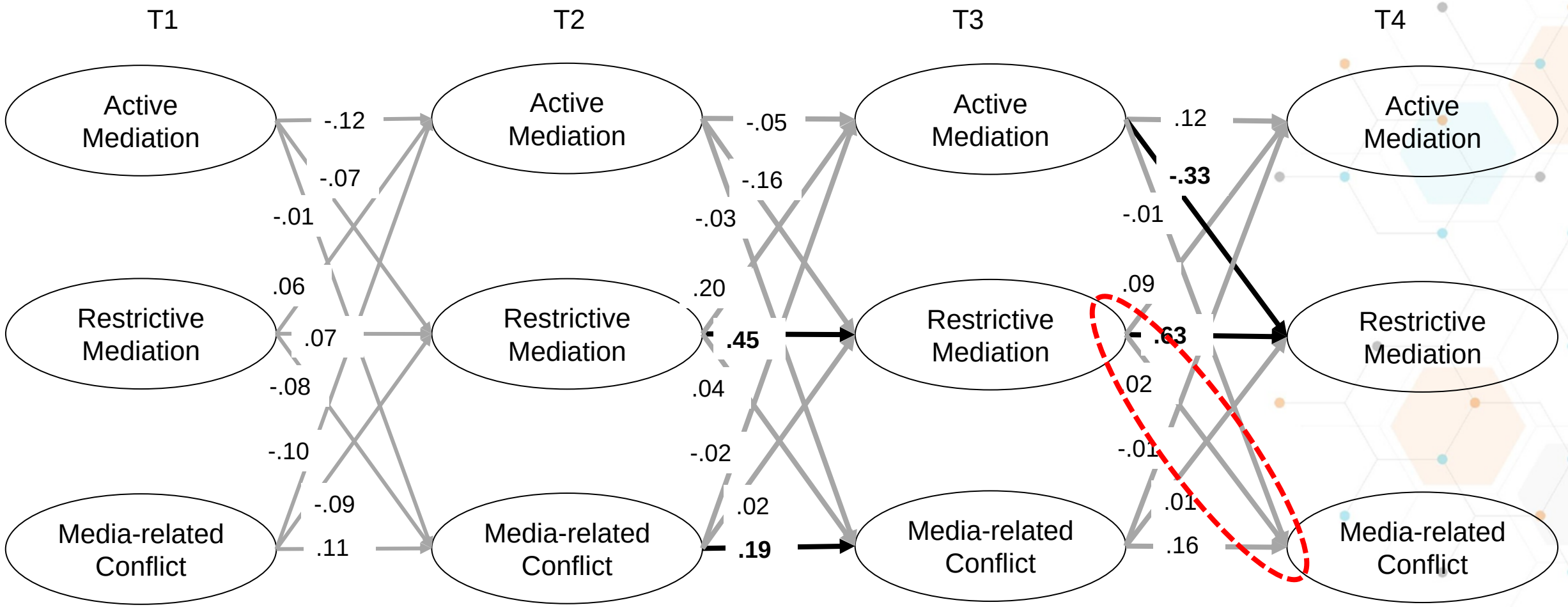
Adolescent-reported data for parental mediation



RI-CLPM, MLR estimator, FIML: $\chi^2(864) = 5024.15$, $p < .001$, CFI = .90, TLI = 89, RMSEA = .04 with 90% CI [.04; .04], SRMR = .04

Results: Within-person part

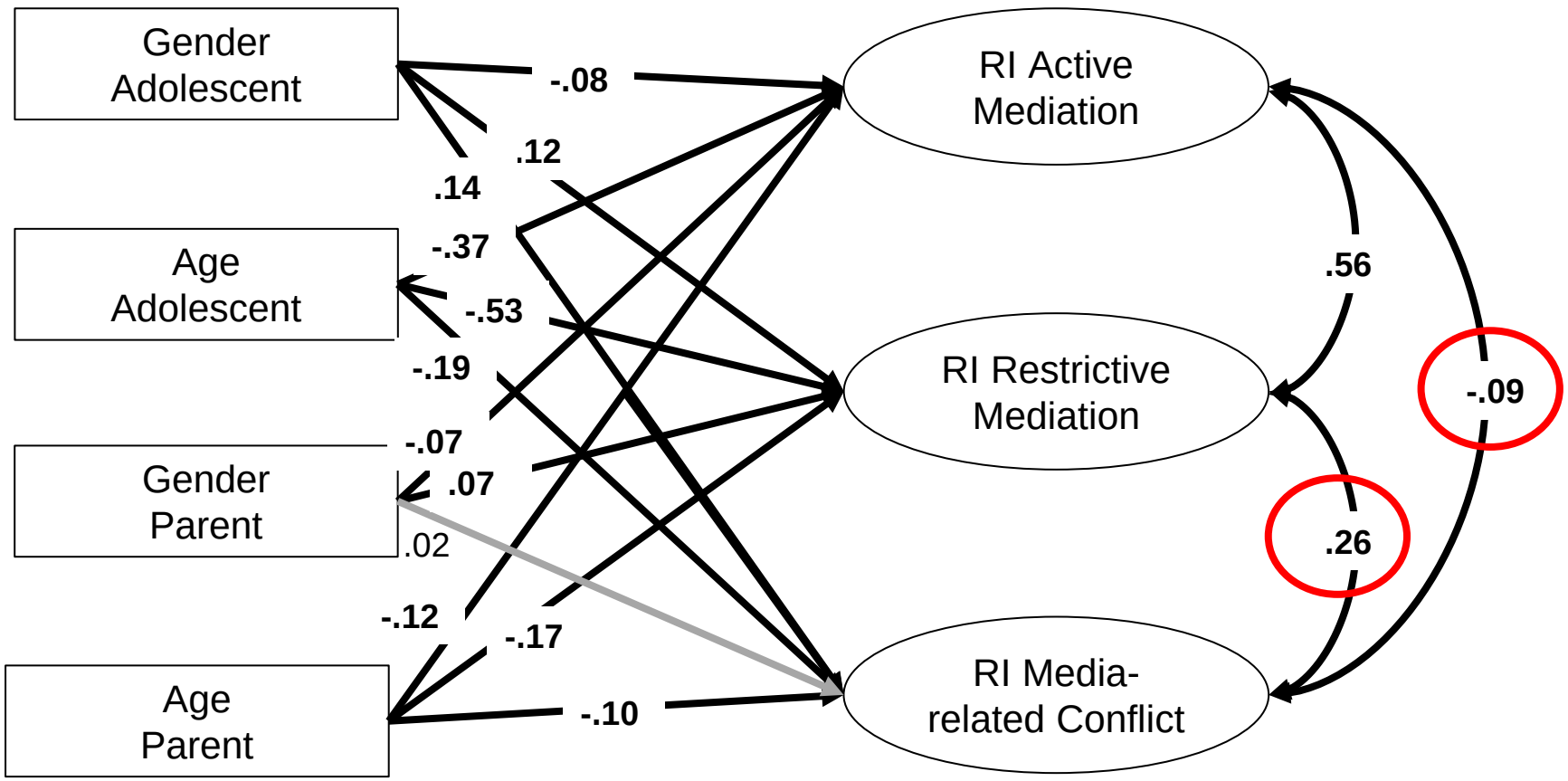
Parent-reported data



RI-CLPM, MLR estimator, FIML: $\chi^2(864) = 4886.38$, $p < .001$, CFI = .90, TLI = 89, RMSEA = .04 with 90% CI [.04; .04], SRMR = .05

Results: Between-person part

Adolescent-reported data for parental mediation



Gender: female (1) – male (2)

RI-CLPM, MLR estimator, FIML: $\chi^2(864) = 5024.15$, $p < .001$, CFI = .90, TLI = 89, RMSEA = .04 with 90% CI [.04; .04], SRMR = .04

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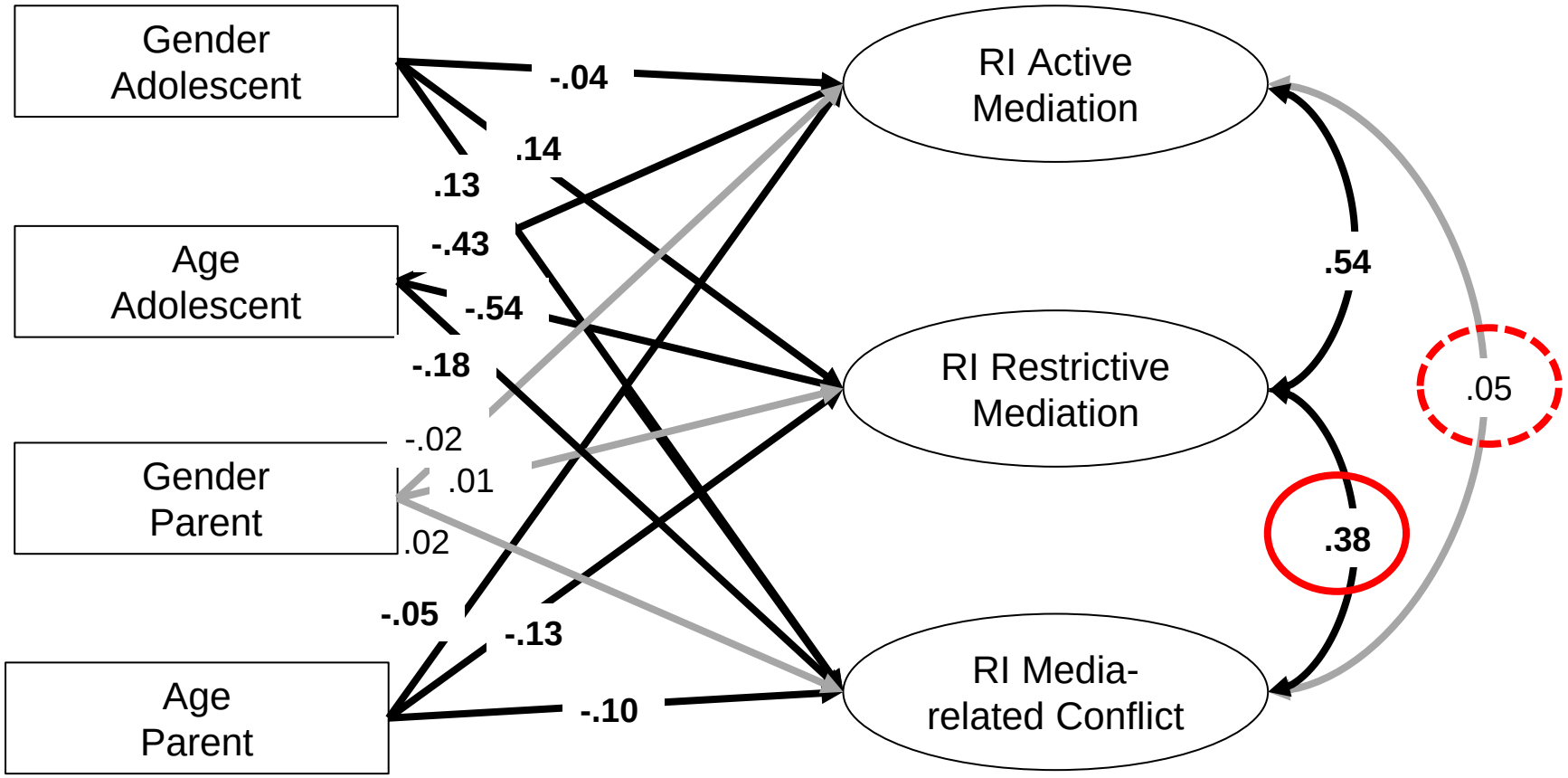

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Discussion

Changes over time (within-person part)

- Cross-lagged paths from parental mediation to media-related conflict were very small and non-significant (against H1a and H1b, only one path significant)
- Media-related conflict does not predict parental mediation (against H2)

Possible explanations

- Controlling / inconsistent vs. autonomy-supportive style of parental mediation (Young & Tully, 2022)
- Effects could be short-lived (Agha et al., 2021)
- Less variance at the within-person (vs. between-person) part could reduce statistical power to detect cross-lagged effects (Mulder, 2023)

Discussion

Time-stable associations (between-person part)

- Media-related conflict positively associated with restrictive mediation (in line with former research)
- Media-related conflict negatively (adolescent-reported data) or not significantly (parent-reported data) associated with active mediation (partly in line with former research)

Moderators might influence all variables

- **Media-related conflict:** worse relationship quality (Martins et al., 2019; Özaslan et al., 2022), more general conflict (Nelissen & Van Den Bulck, 2018), mobile phone use and lower parental responsiveness (Yang & Zhang, 2021)
- **Parental mediation:** value orientation in childrearing (Kirwil, 2009), parental attitudes toward media (Wang et al., 2023)
- **Parental worries** about online risks (Sciacca et al., 2023) are strongly linked to both, parental mediation **and** media-related conflict

Discussion

Limitations

- **Sample attrition** over two years
- **Self-reported data** can be subject to social desirability bias
- Complex **analysis model** limits the number of potential moderators

Implications

- Media-related conflict positively associated with **restrictive mediation** (independently of time-changes), but not (or only weakly) with active mediation

➥ **Support parents for media education**:
avoid controlling or inconsistent, implement autonomy-supportive mediation;
use restrictive mediation in childhood, active mediation in early adolescence,
and self-regulation in late adolescence (Wisniewski et al., 2025)

Thank you for your kind attention!

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Data, material and analyses:
https://osf.io/8fjw3/?view_only=89c6308e94224cd1a1f53674a1311a64

Co-funded by the European Union

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