


# Parental beliefs of development and their correlates with parenting outcomes in adolescence



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# Parental beliefs about development: What are they?

- Parental beliefs refer to what parents think about how children develop, and how these thought processes are related to important outcomes in the course of development (Peet, 1991).
- Although parental views have an objective component, they are far from pure descriptions (Pauli-Pott et al., 2003). They also include:
  - ⇒ a subjective component (bias), and
  - ⇒ an error component.



# Parental beliefs about development: Where do they come from?

- According to the constructivist view, parents construe and alter their beliefs on the basis of their experience with children (McGuillicuddy-DeLisi, 1982).
  - ⇒ E.g., the differential experience of fathers and mothers with the child (Besevegis & Pavlopoulos, 1999).
- Parental beliefs are considered to serve a functional purpose, in order to continue the task of effective parenting (Knight & Goodnow, 1988).
  - ⇒ There tends to be a belief which makes the child (not the parent) responsible for possible failure.
- Parental beliefs may also represent the internalization of cultural norms (Goodnow & Kollins, 1990).



# Parental beliefs about development: What are their consequences?

- Parental beliefs are thought to affect parenting behavior and, consequently, child development (Grusec, 2006) in many ways:
  - ⇒ they compose self-fulfilling prophecies in the form of expectations concerning specific outcomes,
  - ⇒ they are important agents of cultural transmission.
- In a previous study, associations of parental beliefs were found with the level of discrepancy between observed and desirable personality traits of their adolescent children (Besevegis, Georgouleas, & Pavlopoulos, 2007).
- The importance of parents' schemas in intervention programs.



# Research questions

- Are parental beliefs of development related to gender? (differential experience)
- Are parental beliefs of development related to the quality of parent-adolescent communication?
- Are parental beliefs of development related to the number of psychological symptoms reported by the adolescents?
- Is the relationship between parental beliefs of development and adolescents' psychological symptoms mediated by the quality of parent-adolescent communication?



# Participants

***N* = 100 families**

**Parents' gender**

Mothers: 100

Fathers: 100

**Adolescents' gender**

Girls: 43

Boys: 57

**Adolescents' age**

Mean = 12.9 yrs      min. = 11.0

St.Dev. = 1.2 yrs      max. = 14.8

**Place of residence**

Athens: 64

Other areas: 36



# Measures for parents

## **Beliefs About Development Scale (Martin & Johnson, 1992)**

⇒ 30 items

Three definitions of development:

- ⇒ *Learning*. Changes are shaped by the social and physical environment through mechanisms such as reinforcement, reward, imitation and modeling.
- ⇒ *Cognitive-Developmental*. Dynamic interaction between child's knowledge and the environment. The child is viewed as an active processor.
- ⇒ *Maturational*. The gradual unfolding of the child's potential emerges spontaneously as a result of a natural biological growth.



# Measures for parents

Beliefs About Development Scale – representative item



*When do children usually follow rules?*

- ⇒ When they want the approval of others or they fear punishment (LEARNING)
- ⇒ When the rules are appropriate for their age level (MATURATIONAL)
- ⇒ When children understand the reasons for the rules (COGNITIVE-DEVELOPMENTAL)





# Measures for adolescents

## **Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) (Goodman et al., 1998)**

- ⇒ Overall Problem index (15 items,  $\alpha = .72$ )
- ⇒ Prosocial behavior (5 items,  $\alpha = .62$ )

## **Parent-Adolescent Communication (Olson, McCubbin, Barnes, Muxen, Larsen et al., 1989)**

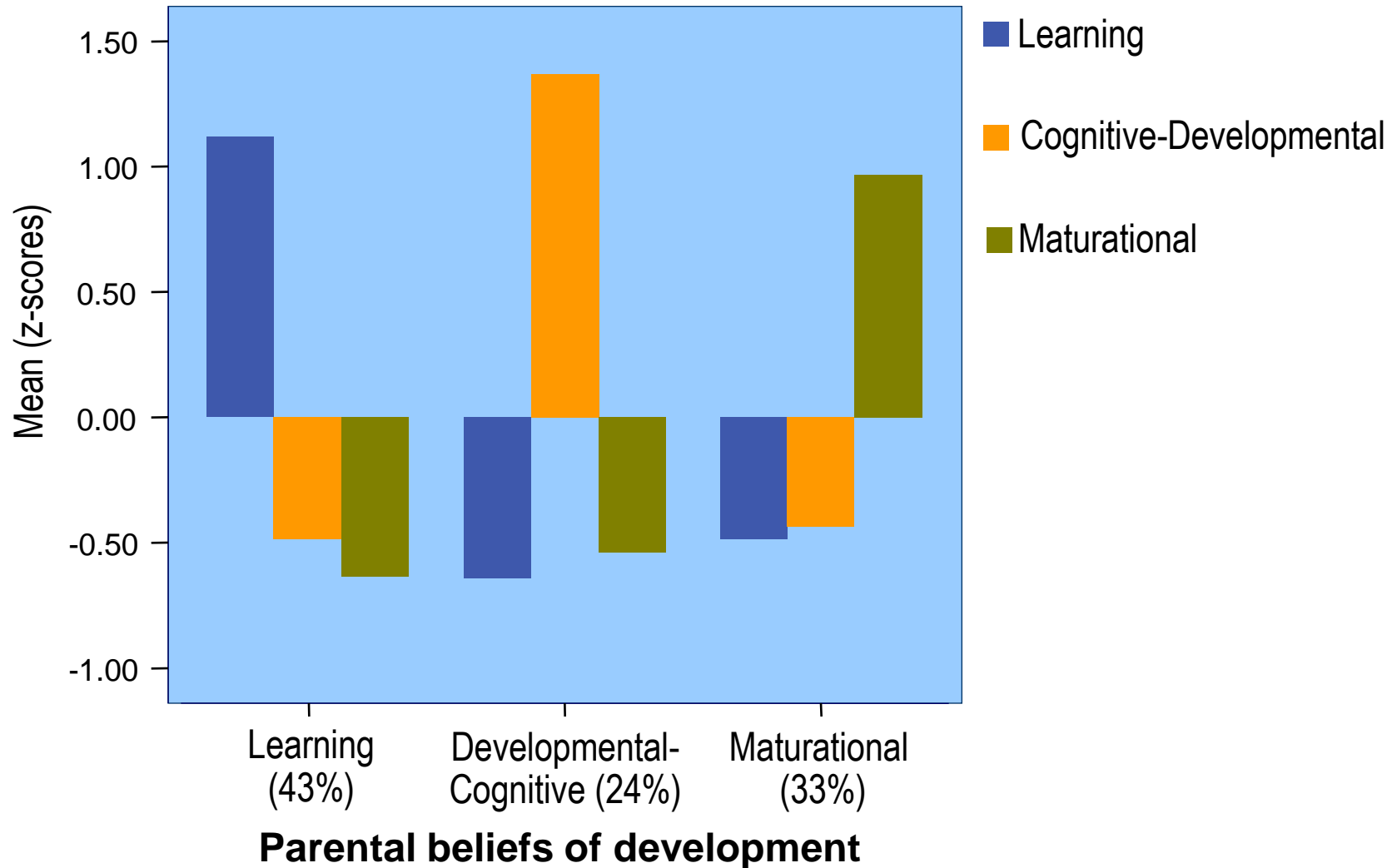
- ⇒ Open communication (10 items,  $\alpha = .87$ )
- ⇒ Communication problems (10 items,  $\alpha = .78$ )



# Results

- Preliminary analyses: Create clusters of parents on the basis of their beliefs about development.
  - ⇒ Person-focused approach (preferred to variable focused since the three BAD scores are not independent).

# Clusters of parents on the basis of their beliefs about development

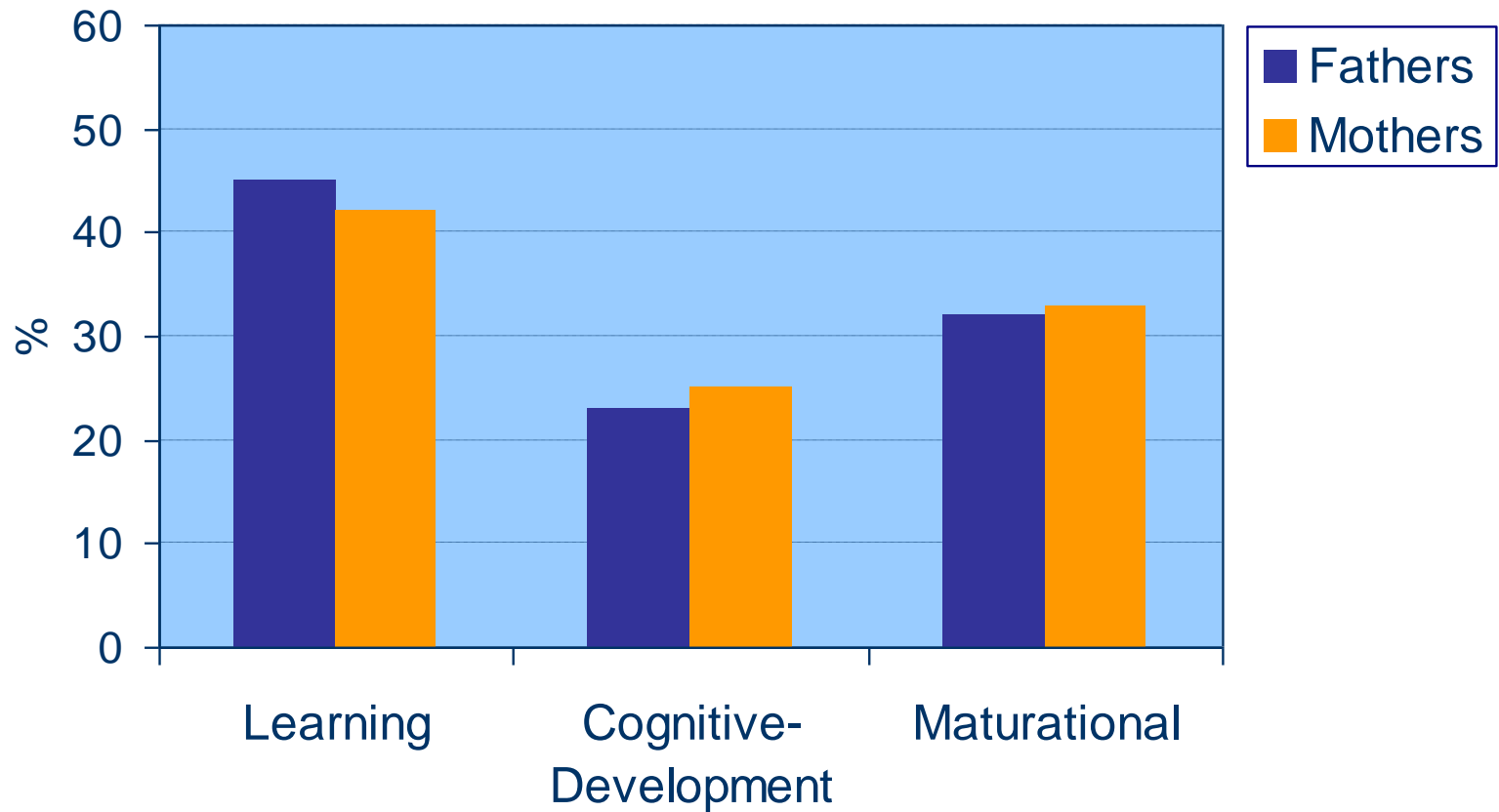




# Research question 1

- Are parental beliefs of development related to gender?
  - ⇒ Gender of parents
  - ⇒ Gender of the adolescents

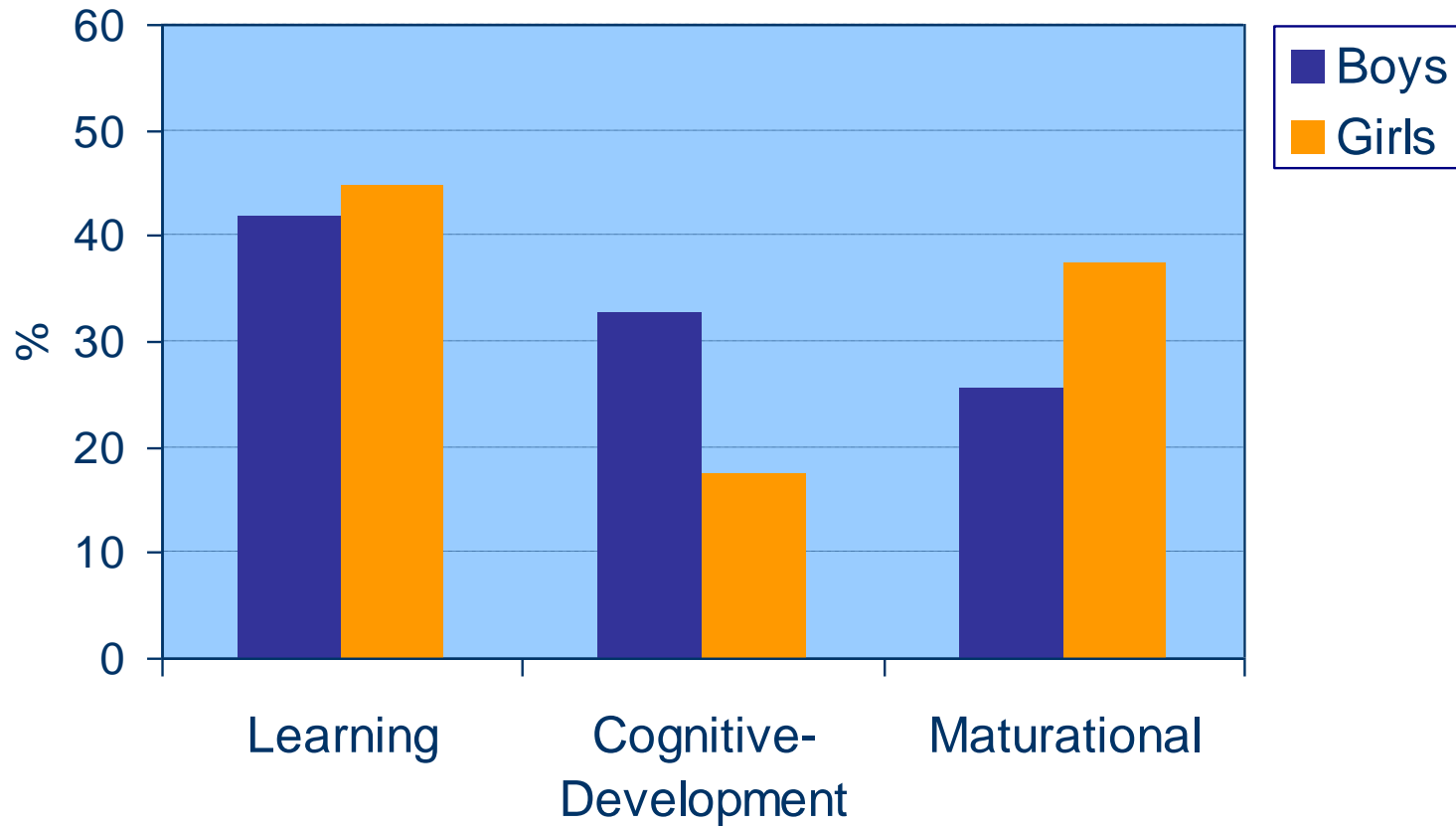
# Parental beliefs of development as a function of parents' gender



Parental beliefs of development

$$\chi^2(2) = 0.20, p = .904$$

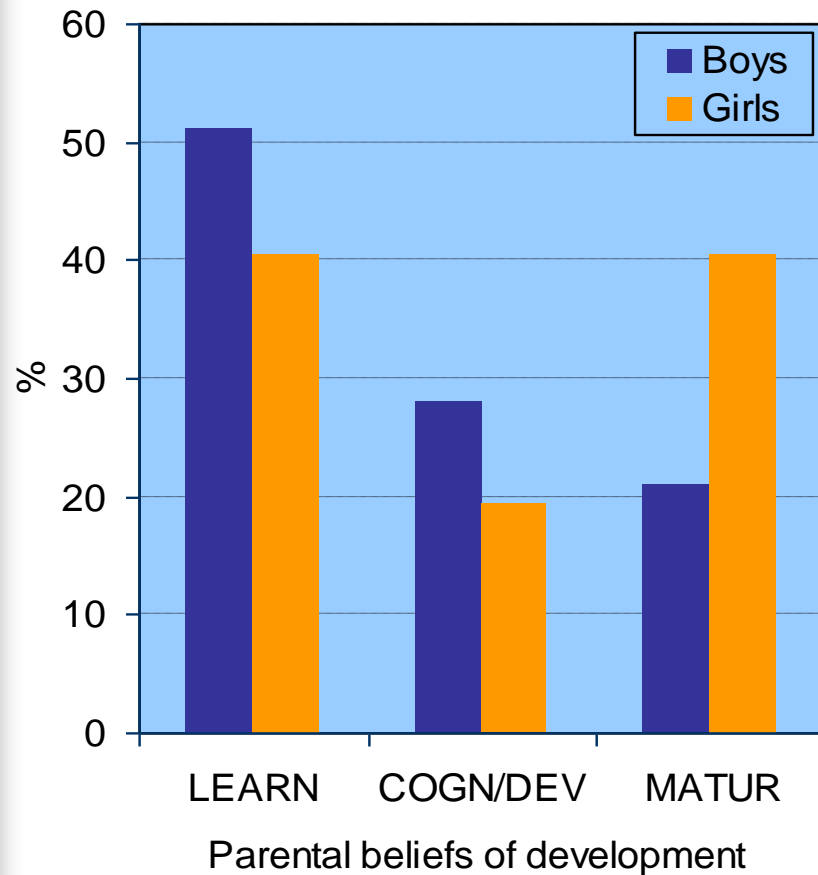
# Parental beliefs of development as a function of adolescents' gender



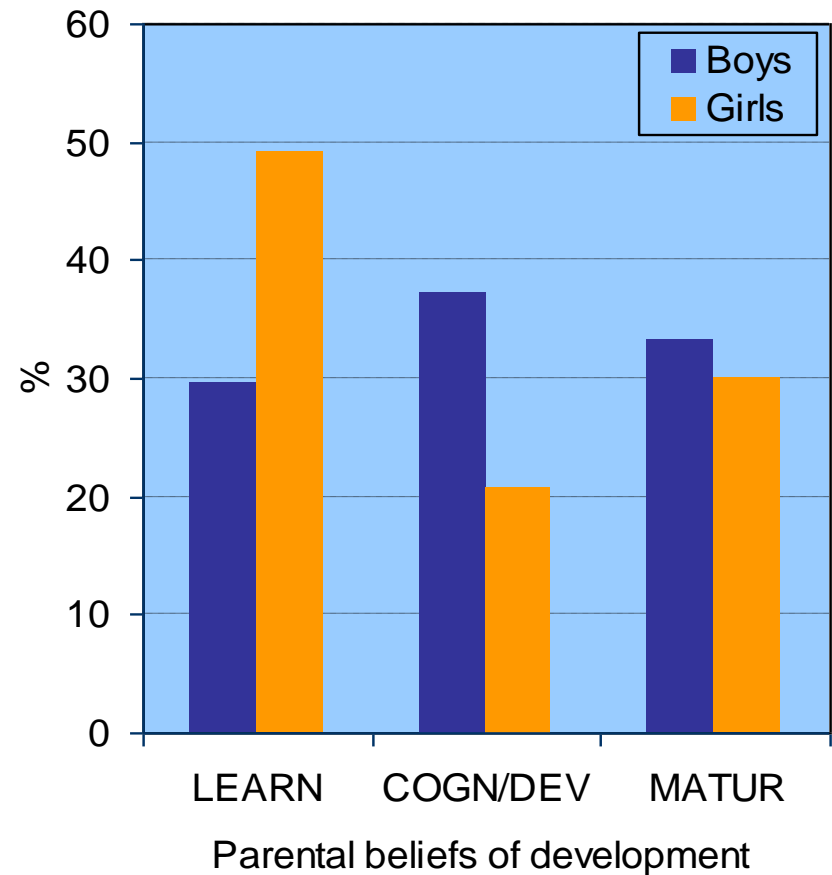
Parental beliefs of development

$\chi^2(2) = 6.92, p = .031$

# Parental beliefs of development as a function of adolescents' gender (separately for fathers and mothers)



Fathers:  $\chi^2(2) = 4.32, p = .116$



Mothers:  $\chi^2(2) = 6.27, p = .034$

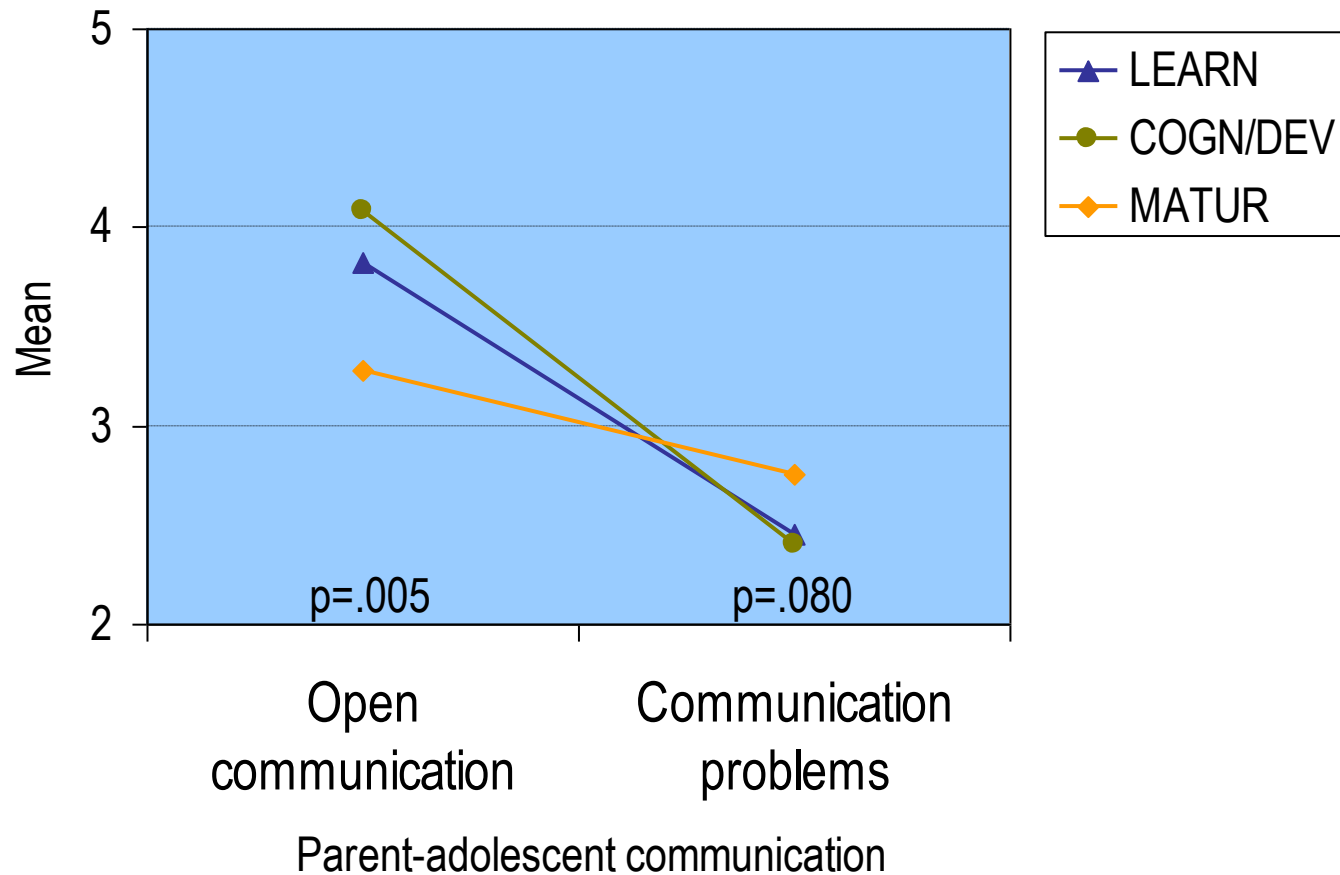


## Research question 2

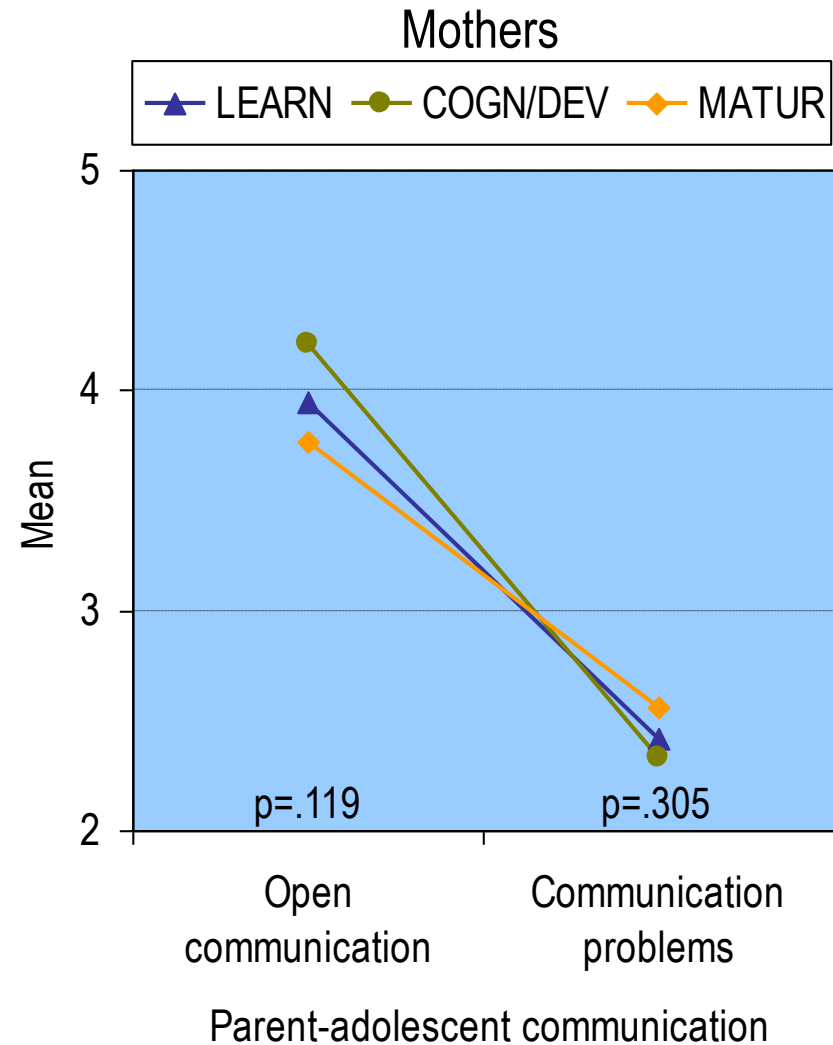
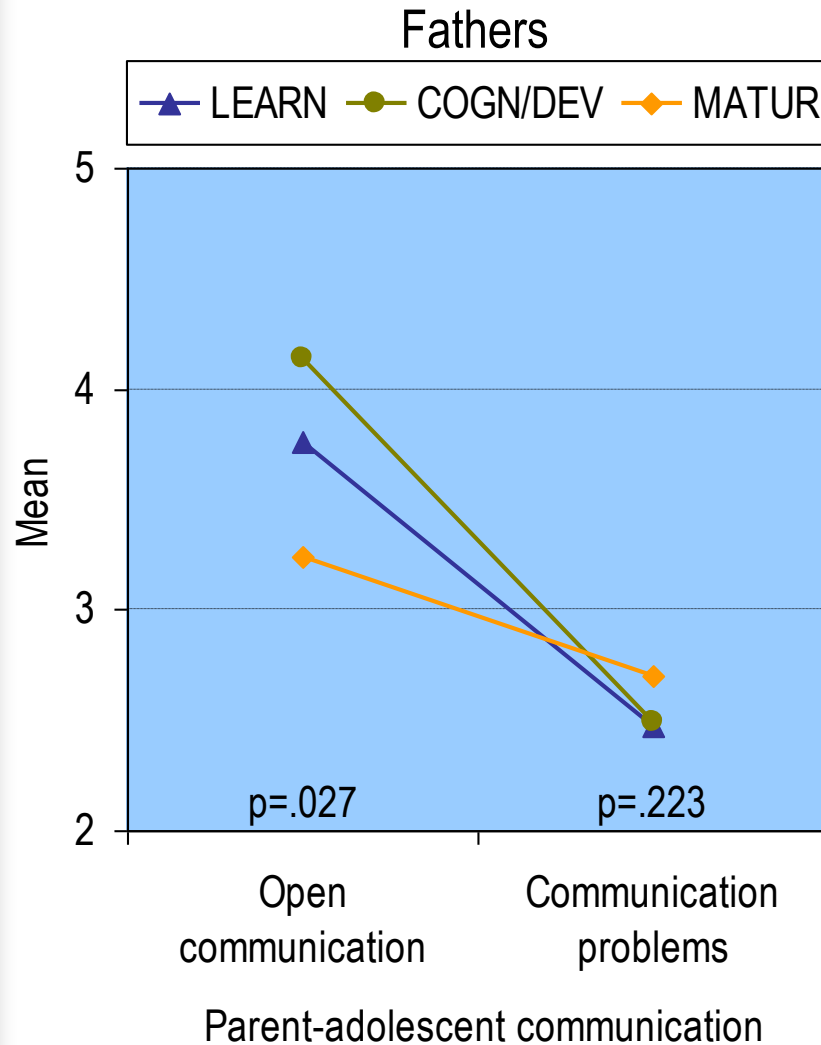
- Are parental beliefs of development related to parent-adolescent communication?
  - ⇒ ANOVAs of PAC dimensions (open communication, communication problems) as a function of clusters of parental beliefs about development.
  - ⇒ Also tested for interaction effects:
    - parental beliefs X gender of parent
    - parental beliefs X gender of adolescent



# Parent-adolescent communication as a function of parental beliefs of development



# Parent-adolescent communication as a function of parental beliefs of development

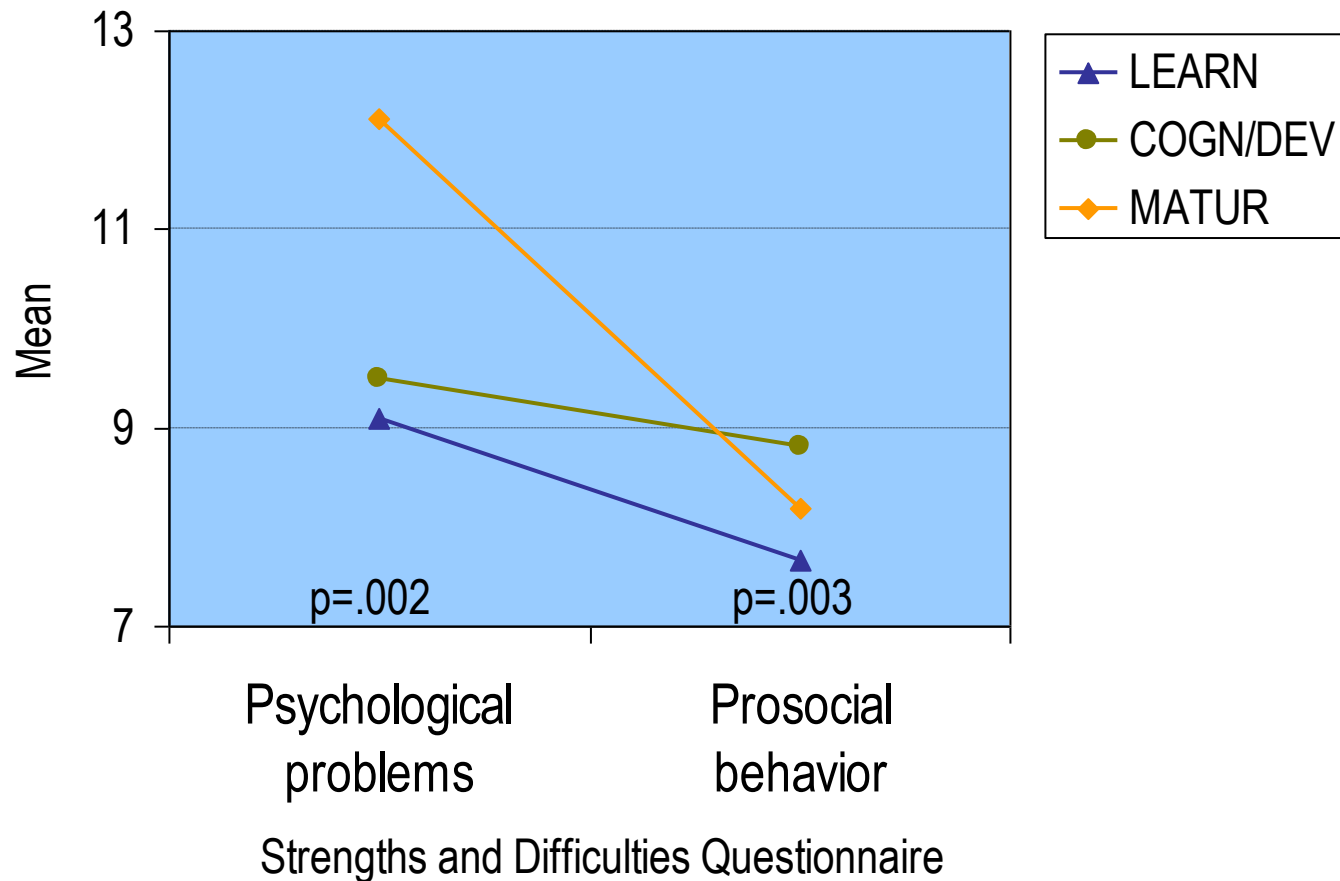




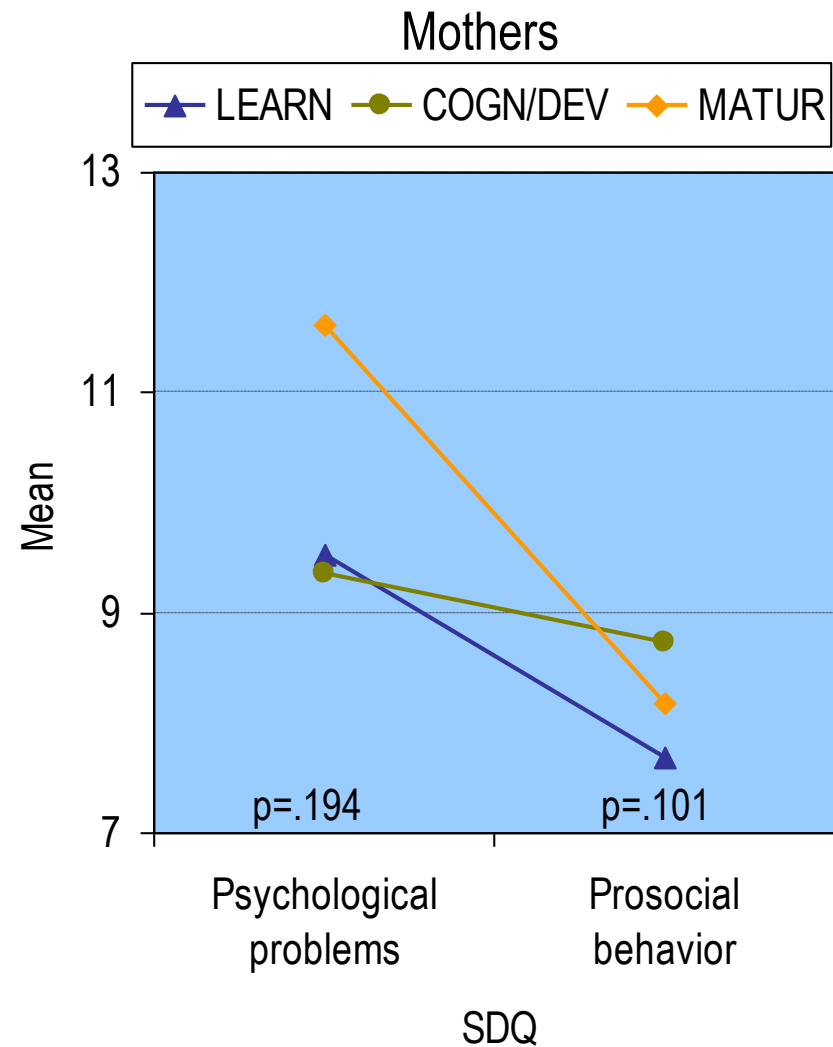
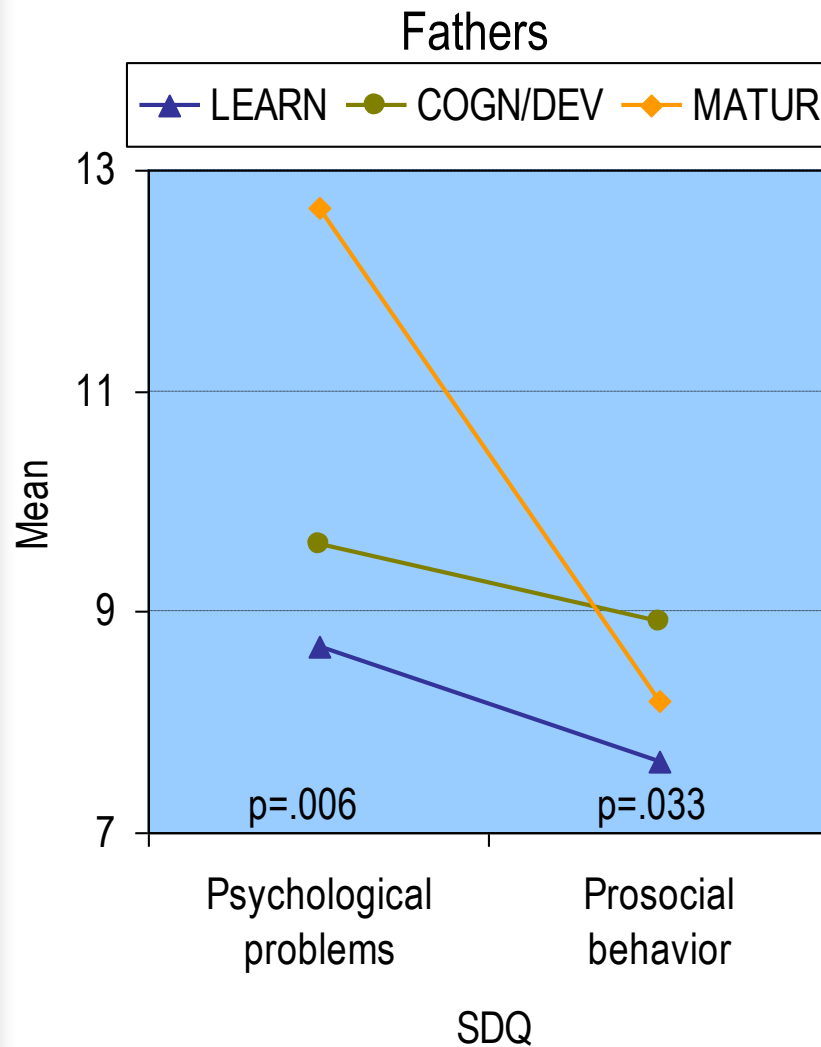
## Research question 3

- Are parental beliefs of development related to psychological symptoms of the adolescents?
  - ⇒ ANOVAs of SDQ scales (overall problems score, prosocial behavior) as a function of clusters of parental beliefs about development.
  - ⇒ Also tested for interaction effects:
    - parental beliefs X gender of parent
    - parental beliefs X gender of adolescent

# Adolescents' psychological symptoms as a function of parental beliefs of development



# Adolescents' psychological symptoms as a function of parental beliefs of development





## Research question 4

- Is the relationship between parental beliefs of development and adolescents' psychological symptoms **MEDIATED** by the quality of parent-adolescent communication?
  - ⇒ ANCOVAs of SDQ scales (overall problems score, prosocial behavior) as a function of clusters of parental beliefs about development...
  - ⇒ ...using the two dimensions of parent-adolescent communication as control variables (covariates).

# F-values of parental beliefs of development on adolescents' psychological symptoms

	Fathers' BAD	Mothers' BAD
	F	F
<i>No control variables included</i>		
Psychological problems	<b>5.33**</b>	1.67
Prosocial behavior	<b>3.52*</b>	2.34
<i>Controlling for parent-adolescent communication</i>		
Psychological problems	<b>3.54*</b>	0.65
Prosocial behavior	<b>3.60*</b>	2.25

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$



## Research question 4 (extended)

- Explore the simultaneous relationships between parental beliefs of development, parent-adolescent communication and adolescents' psychological symptoms in one single design.
  - ⇒ ANACOR of BAD, PAC, and SDQ...
  - ⇒ ...after creating clusters for all three constructs.





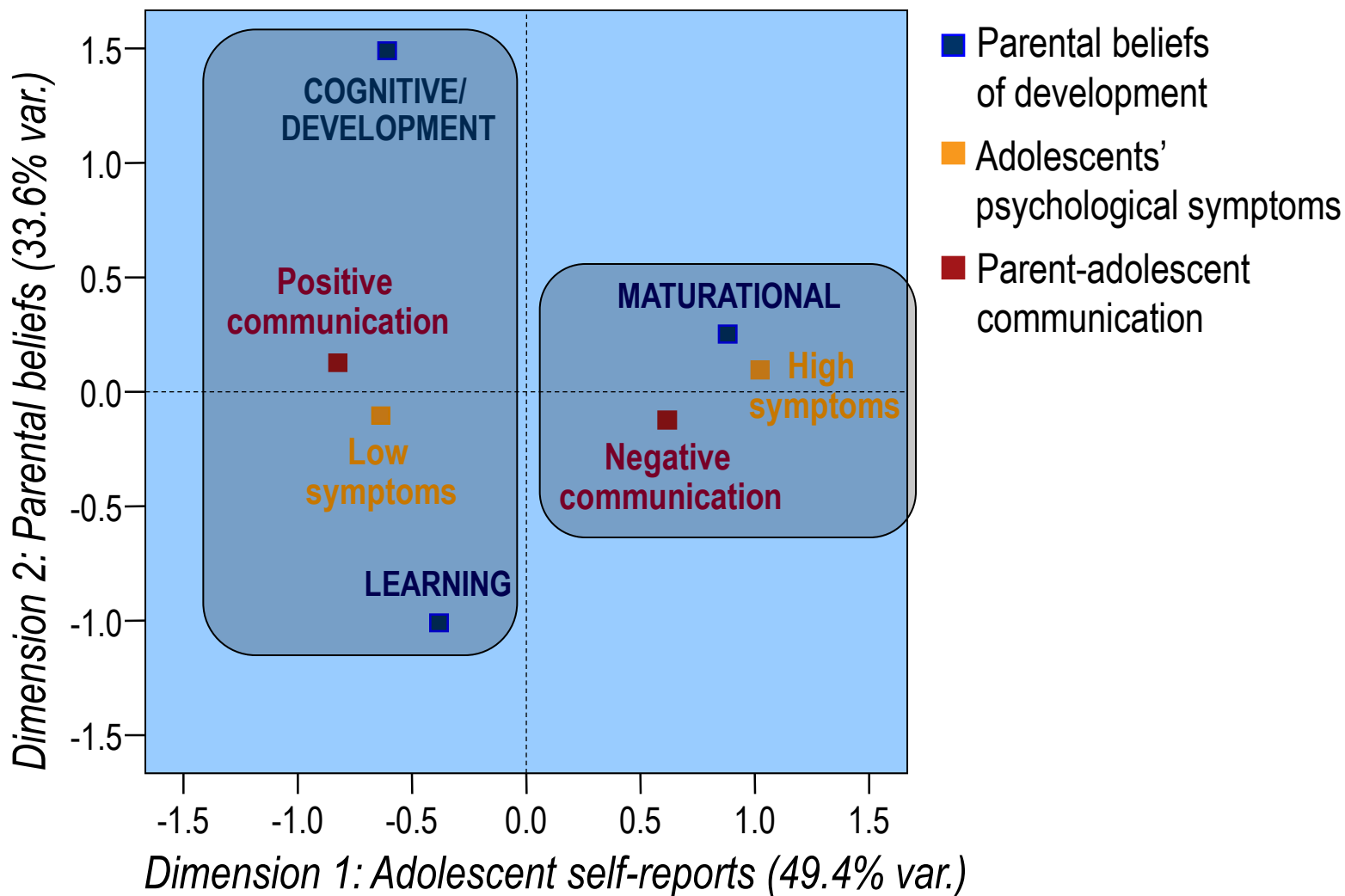
# Clusters of adolescents based on parent-adolescent communication and level of reported psychological symptoms

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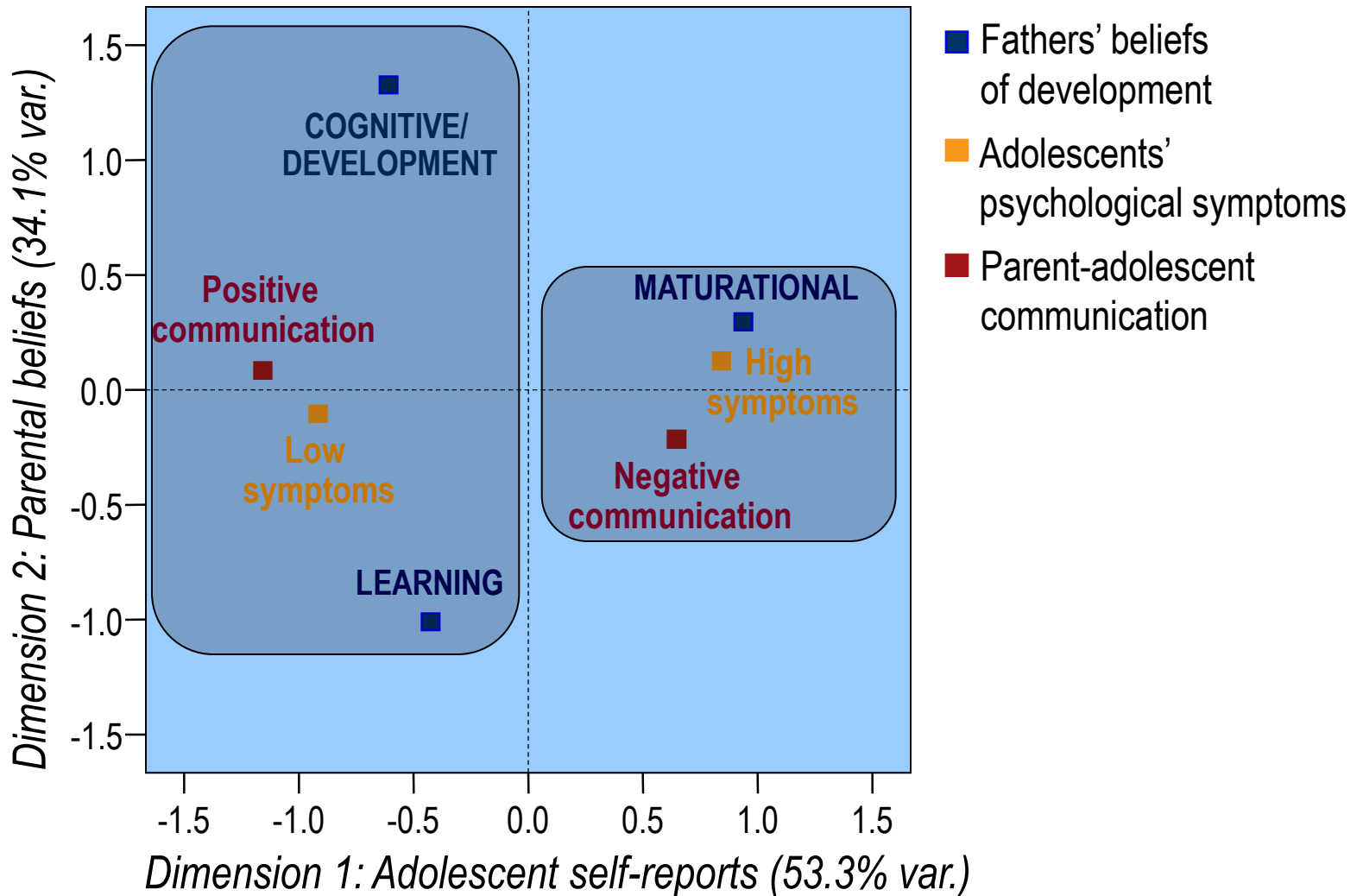
	%
<i>Parent-adolescent communication</i>	
Positive	41.5
Negative	58.5
<i>Adolescents' psychological symptoms</i>	
Low	61.0
High	39.0

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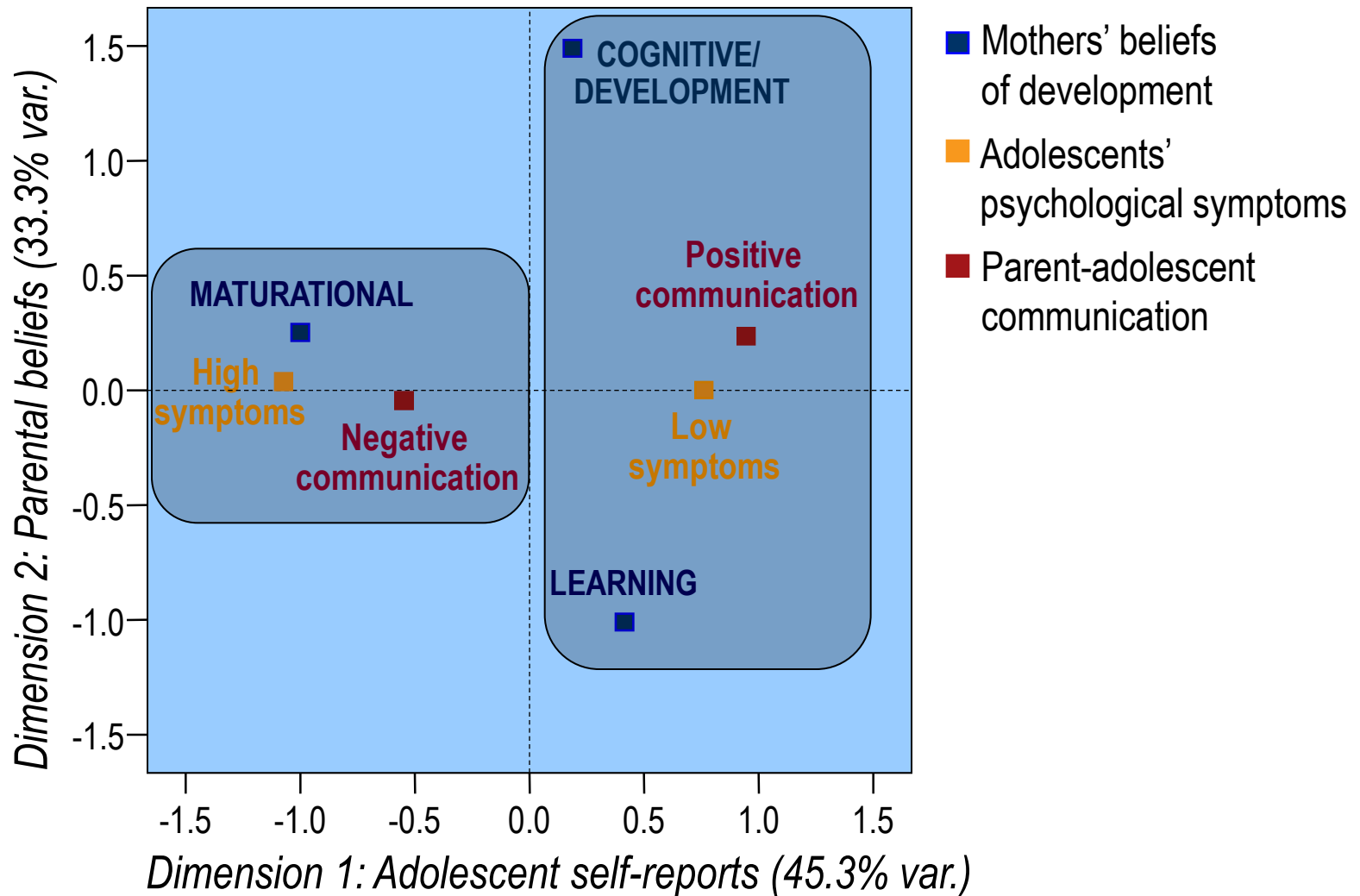
# Multiple analysis of correspondence of parental beliefs and adolescent self-reports



# Multiple analysis of correspondence of **fathers'** beliefs and adolescent self-reports



# Multiple analysis of correspondence of **mothers'** beliefs and adolescent self-reports





# Conclusions

- The findings of this study seem to partly support the constructivist approach, since parents' gender differentiated their beliefs about development.
  - ⇒ However, the pattern of associations between parental beliefs and outcome variables presented more similarities than differences (possibly due to shared cultural norms?)
- As expected, parental beliefs were related to their parenting behavior as well as to the psychological adjustment of their adolescent children.
  - ⇒ It could be hypothesized that parents who adopt a maturational view of development get frustrated when their child fails to exhibit an expected behavior.



# Conclusions

- ⇒ On the other hand, cognitive or learning approaches of development can result in more accurate information regarding a child's potential, which in turn may lead to more successful parenting practices.
- Parent-adolescent communication did not mediate the effect of parental beliefs on adolescents' psychological symptoms.
  - ⇒ Like child behavior, parenting practices may also be considered an outcome of parental beliefs rather than a mediator.
- Most relevant research focuses on infants. Our results indicate that parental beliefs may have important implications for the psychological adaptation of older children and adolescents as well.



# Conclusions

- The direction of causality in our findings is not clear:
  - ⇒ do parental beliefs function as a resource for positive adaptation of adolescents?
  - ⇒ or do they result from the everyday experience of parents with their children's strengths and difficulties?
- A longitudinal (rather than cross-sectional) study is necessary in order to further explore the nature of the above relationships.