Externalizing behavior, reading skills, and parental involvement: Patterns of influence in a sample of inner city elementary school children

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Background

- Entrance into elementary school is an important developmental transition (Entwisle et al., 1988)

- Significant challenges to child's family structure and coping mechanisms (Entwisle et al., 1988)

- Children maladjusted to new school environments are at higher risk of problem behaviors (Tolan, Gorman-Smith, & Henry, 2004)

Externalizing Behaviors

- More stable than internalizing behaviors (e.g., withdrawal, dysphoria, anxiety) (Hinshaw, 1992)

- Characterized by hostile and aggressive behavior, impulsivity, hyperactivity, defiance, and concentration problems (Hinshaw, 1992; Deater-Deckard et al., 1998)

- Often lead to antisocial behavior, immature social relationships, substance abuse, delinquency, criminality (Deater-Deckard et al., 1998)

Reading Skills

- Early experiences in the classroom can frame future academic pursuits (Tolan, Gorman-Smith, & Henry, 2004)

- Illiteracy holds consequences for personal, professional, and emotional adjustment of the individual (Spreen, 1986)

- Reading problems are stable and can incur high societal costs without early intervention (Smart, Sanson, & Prior, 1996)

Parental Involvement in School

- Parents raising children in the inner city face increased levels of unique challenges (Tolan, Gorman-Smith, & Henry, 2004)
- First grade children form expectations about school and value themselves based on evaluations by significant others (Entwisle et al., 1988)
- Positive parental involvement promotes competence and the internalization of parental values (Beyers et al., 2003)

Patterns of Influence
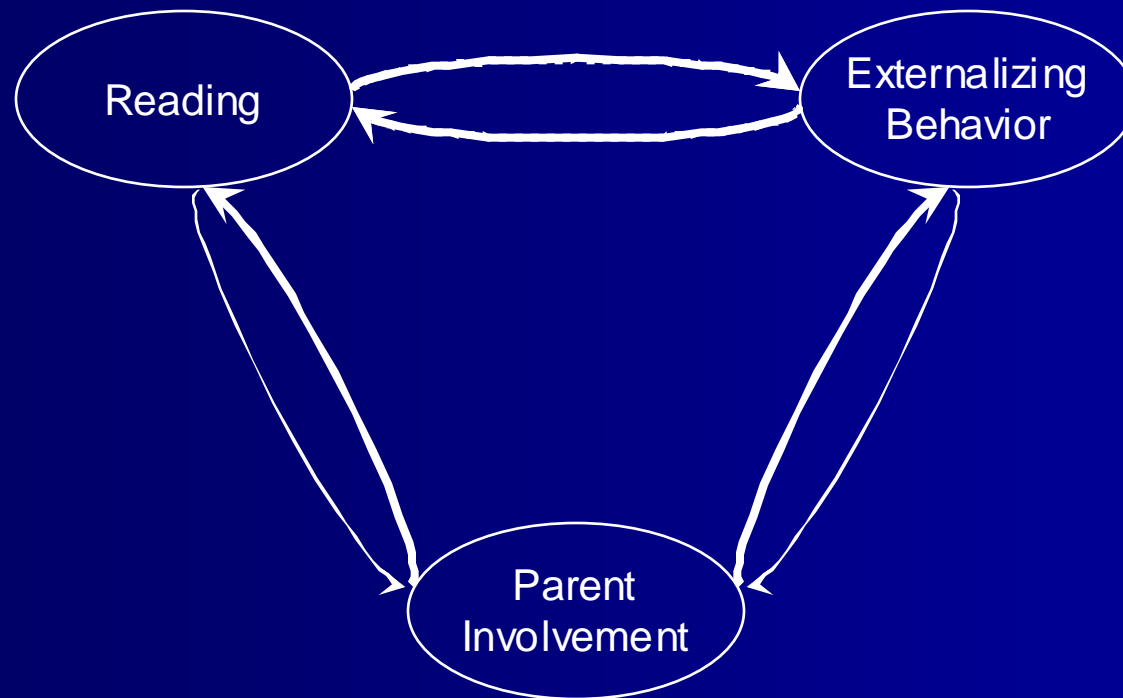
SAFEChildren

- Preventive intervention with two components
  - Multiple-family groups
  - Phonics-based reading tutoring program
- 22 weeks of intervention begun at start of first grade

Methods

- Research participants: 424 families from 7 inner city Chicago schools
  - 42.5% African American
  - 57.5% Latino
  - 51% male
  - 49% female
  - 40% in single-parent households
 - 59% annual family income below $20,000
  - 85% annual family income below $30,000

Methods

- Five waves of data collection:
  - Wave 1: End of kindergarten (Pretest 1)
  - Wave 2: Beginning of first grade (Pretest 2)
  - Wave 3: Midintervention (Only teacher data)*
  - Wave 4: End of first grade (Posttest)
  - Wave 5: 6 months later (Follow-up)

  *Wave 3 is excluded in this analysis

Measures

- Woodcock Diagnostic Reading Battery
  - Measures reading achievement
- Teacher/Parent Observations of Classroom Adaptation
  - Measures child's externalizing behaviors
- Fast Track Parent Involvement Scales (Parent and Teacher Forms)
  - Measures parental involvement in school
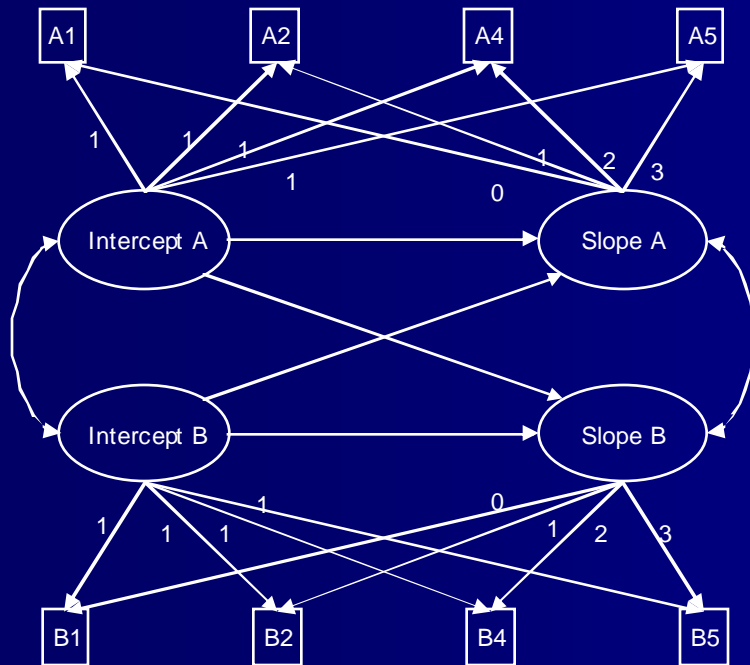
Analytic Model – Simultaneous Latent Growth Curve
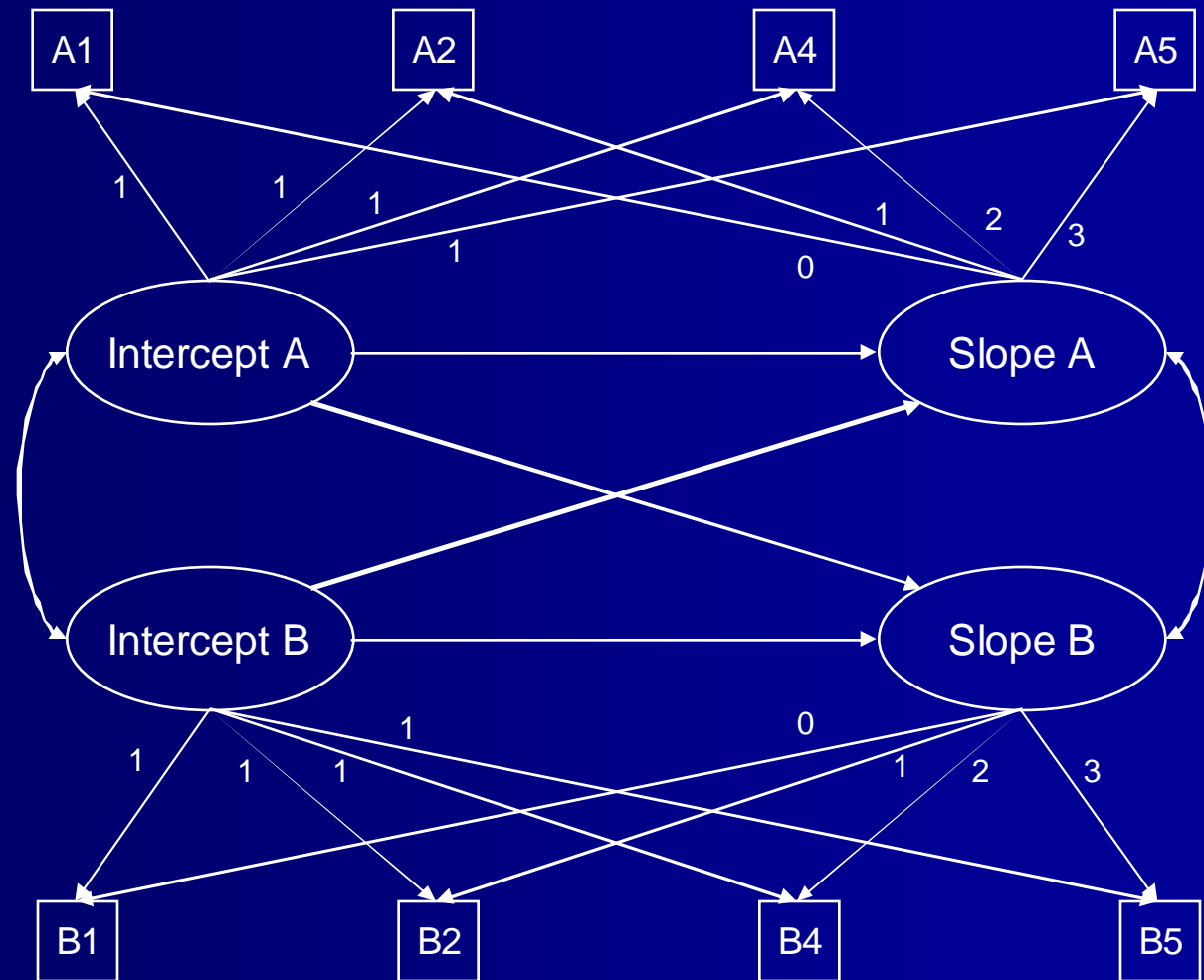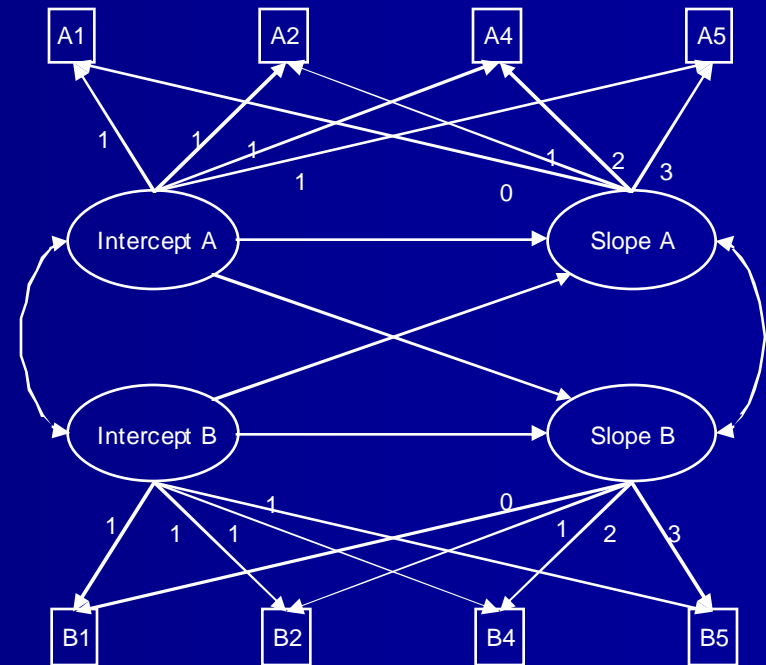
Analytic Model – Alternative Model
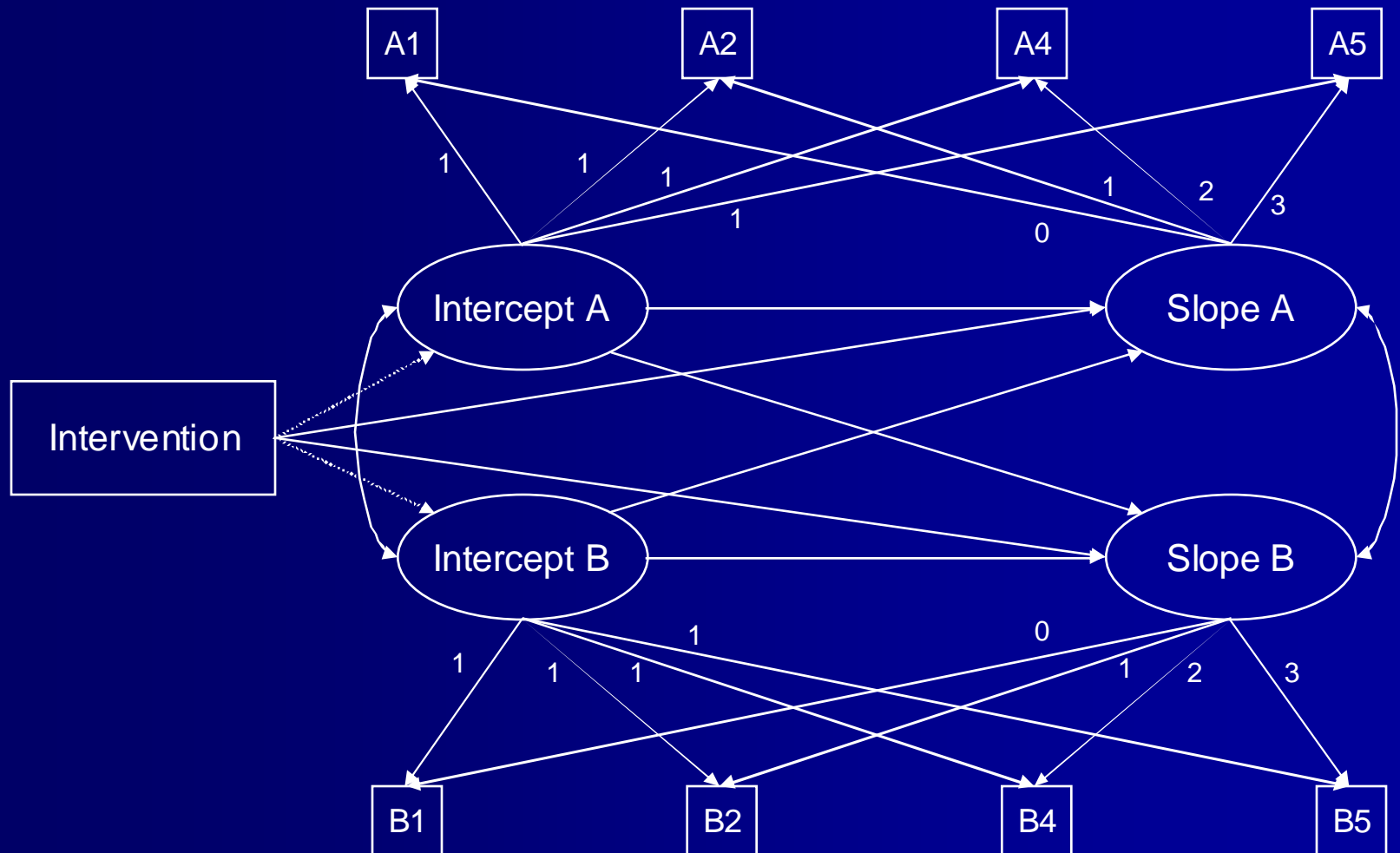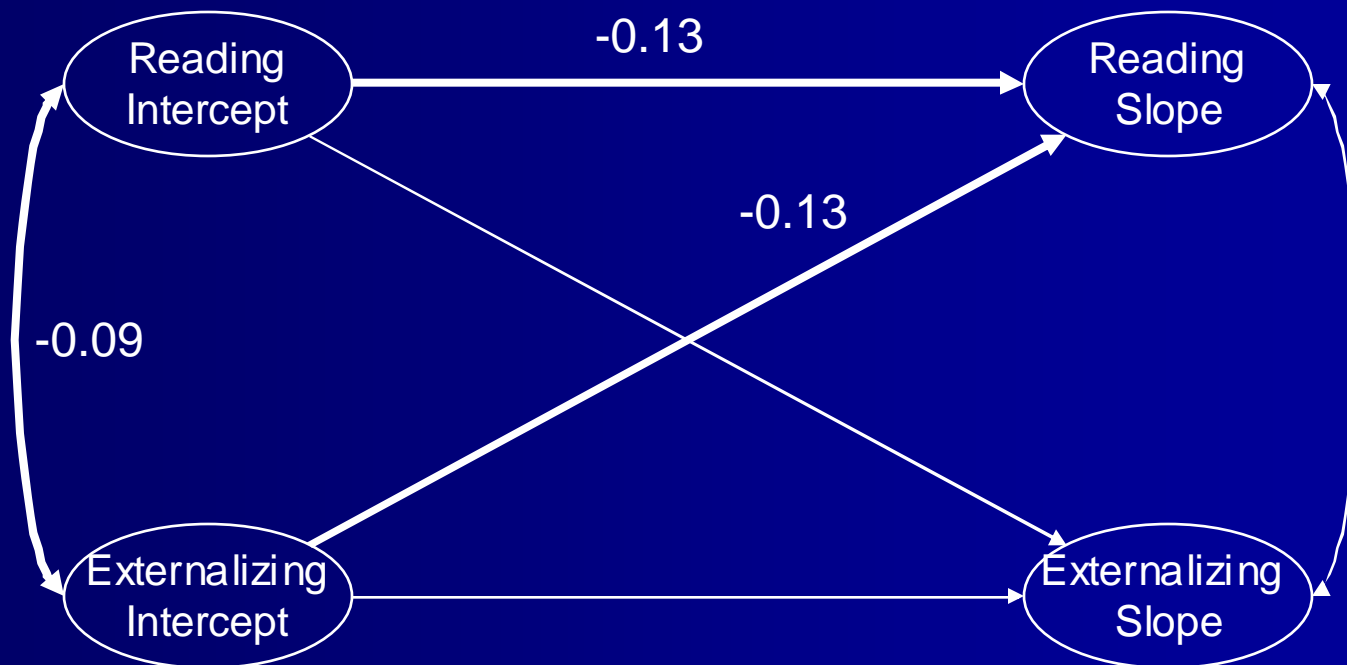
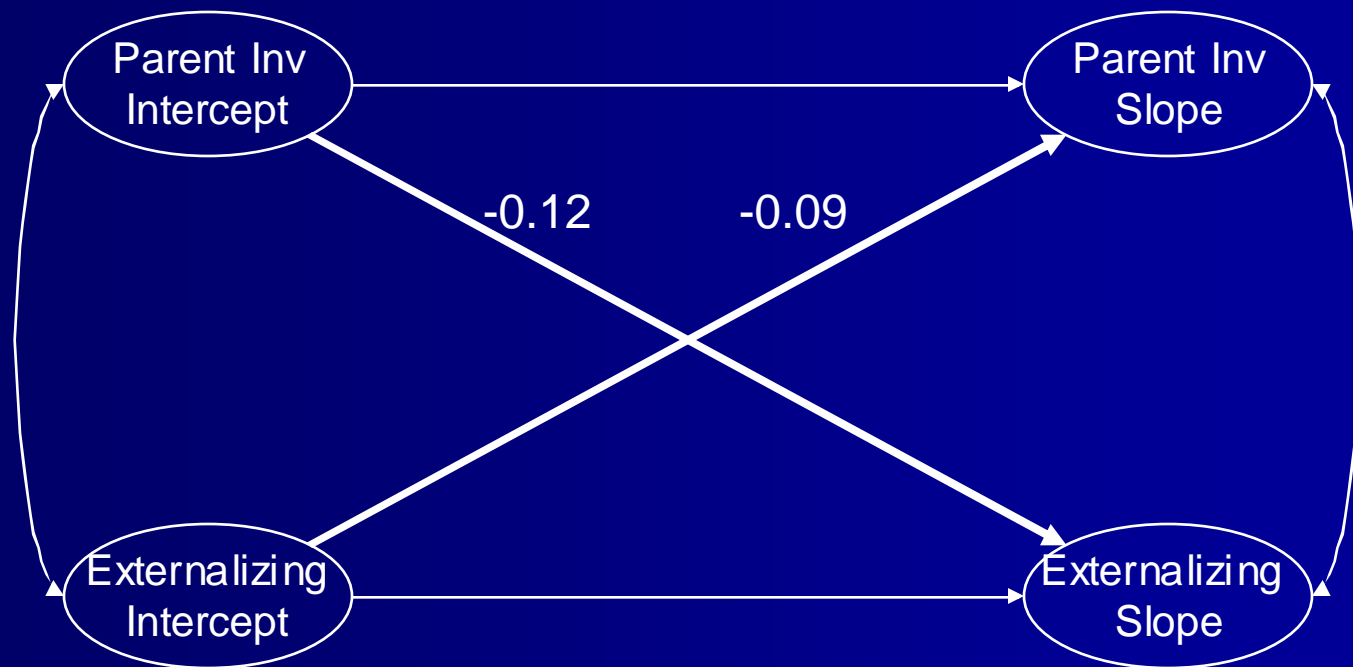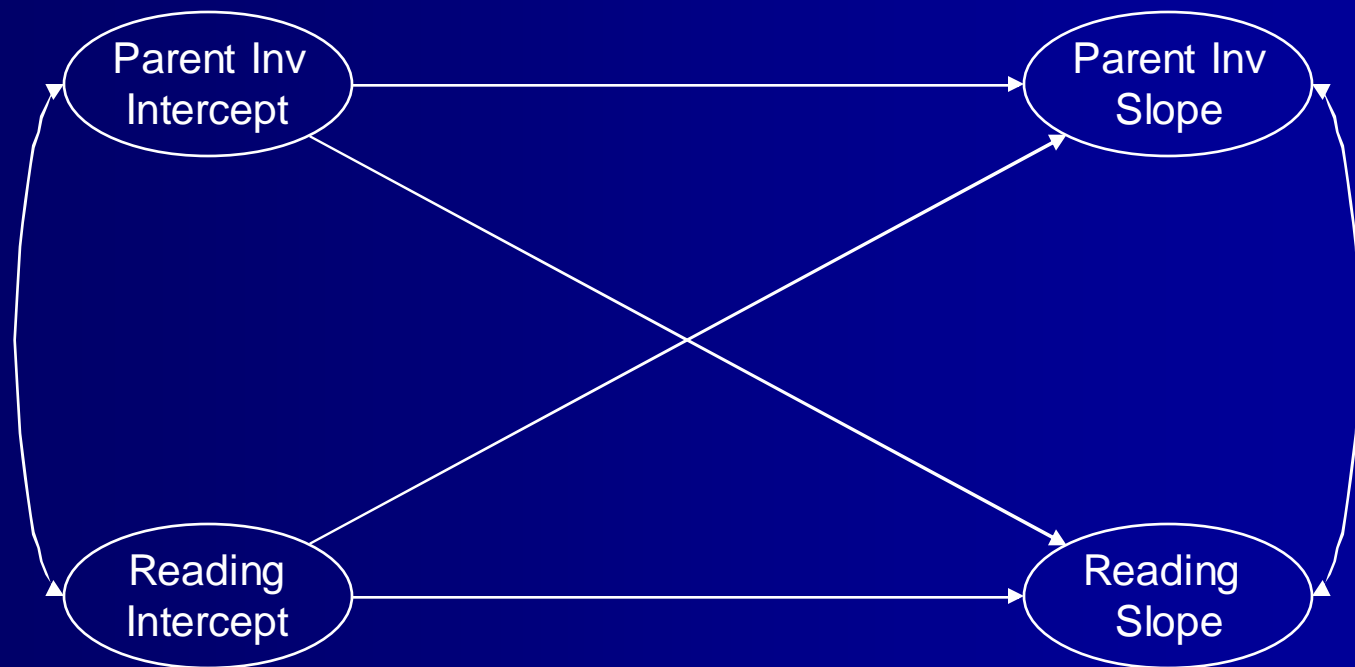# Analytic Model – Two Group Model

Group 1

Group 2

Reading Skills and Externalizing Behavior

Parental Involvement in School and Externalizing Behavior

Parental Involvement in School and Reading Skills

Summary

- Evidence of unidirectional relation between reading skills and externalizing behaviors

- Evidence of bidirectional relation between parental involvement in school and externalizing behaviors

- No relation between parental involvement in school and reading skills

Conclusions

- A focus on reducing problem behaviors holds implications for improving reading skills and increasing parental involvement in school

- Interventions should consider the bidirectional relation between parental involvement in school and externalizing behavior

- More intervention research is needed to determine clear causal pathways between variables

Thank you!