

Recollections of Peer Victimization in Adolescence: Do They Predict Emerging Adults' Rejection Sensitivity and Romantic Conflict Resolution?

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Introduction

- ❖ Forming romantic relationships is a developmental task for emerging adults (Collins et al., 2006).
- ❖ Adolescent peer relationships set the stage for later romantic relationships; yet, there is a need for research on how they can do so (Zimmer-Gembeck, 2002).
- ❖ Past research has reported that peer victimization in adolescence is associated with later emotional sensitivity (e.g. rejection sensitivity, depressive symptoms, social anxiety symptoms) (Gembeck, 2015).
- ❖ More rejection sensitive individuals act negatively in ways which undermine their relationships (Gallagher et al., 2010), such as with heightened aggression (Murphy et al., 2018; Ayduk et al., 2008) and hostility (Purdie et al., 2000; Ayduk et al., 1999).
- ❖ Research is limited on whether and how past peer victimization shapes the way young people learn to interact with romantic partners.

The present study

- ❖ Expanding on past research, this study investigates how past peer victimization relates to romantic conflict resolution in emerging adults.
- ❖ In addition to examining direct links between past peer victimization and romantic conflict resolution, we test rejection sensitivity as a potential mediator of these links.
- ❖ We expected that peer victimization would be related to more maladaptive romantic conflict resolution (e.g., more anger and avoidance), and that elevated rejection sensitivity would partially explain these links.

Methods

Participants

- ❖ 328 college students from a university psychology subject pool, receiving credit, took a survey via Qualtrics.
- ❖ Age Range = 18-25; M = 20.05; SD = 1.52 years,
- ❖ 78% female
- ❖ Ethnic composition:
 - White 43.5%, Middle Eastern 21.6%, Asian 14.7%, Black 7.1%, Multiethnic/Other 6.5%, Latino 3.4%.

TABLE 1 Measures		
Retrospective Peer Victimization (Swearer et al., 2003)	$\alpha = .87$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Retrospective self-report frequency of victimization in middle and high school •Items averaged, higher scores=more victimization •Responses ranged 0=never to 4=always •Example: <i>Called me names</i>
Romantic Partner Conflict Scale (Feldman et al., 1998)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Students self-report on handling conflict with recent romantic partner. Participants not in a relationship responded how they would act if they were in one •Response options ranged from 1=never to 5=almost always •Items averaged for each subscale
Overt Anger	$\alpha = .81$	•Example: <i>I try to spite my partner.</i>
Avoidance	$\alpha = .68$	•Example: <i>I go to my room and be alone.</i>
Compromise	$\alpha = .70$	•Example: <i>I try to smooth things over.</i>
Rejection Sensitivity-Adult (Berenson et al., 2009)	$\alpha = .78$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Prompted with a social scenario, assessed students actual and perceived rejection sensitivity. •Responses ranged from (A) 1=very unconcerned to 6= very concerned and (B) 1=very unlikely to 6=very likely •Item B was reverse scored and then averaged with item A. All items averaged such that higher scores=more rejection sensitive •Example: <i>You call a friend when there is something on your mind that you feel you really need to talk about. A. How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not your friend would want to listen? B. I would expect that he/she would listen and support me.</i>

Results

TABLE 2 Bivariate Correlations and Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables					
Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. Peer Victimization	-				
2. Rejection Sensitivity	.206***	-			
3. Anger	.053	.156**	-		
4. Compromise	.130*	-.065	-.270***	-	
5. Avoidance	.033	.198***	.426**	-.133*	-
Mean	.660	8.50	2.43	3.92	2.77
Standard Deviation	.820	3.45	.670	.600	.740
Range	0-4	1-36	1-5	1-5	1-5

Note: *** $p < .001$. ** $p < .01$. * $p < .05$.

Indirect Effects

- ❖ Using a bootstrapped mediation model, we examined the indirect effect of rejection sensitivity on peer victimization and conflict resolution strategies (i.e., compromise, anger, and avoidance) using PROCESS v3.4 macro (Hayes, 2017).

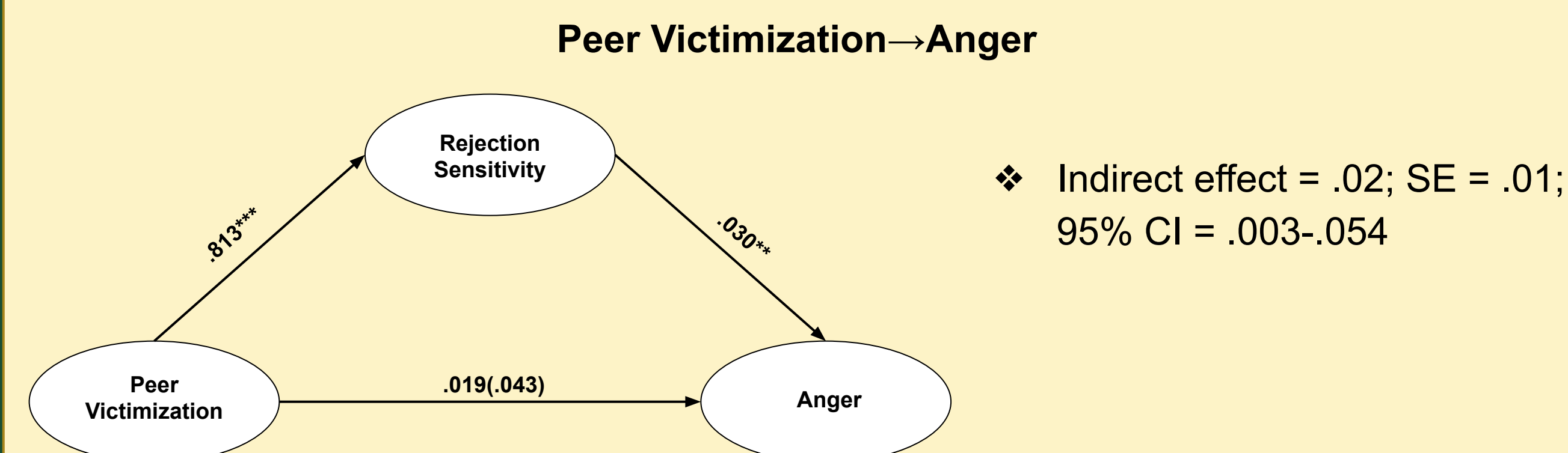


Figure 1: Direct and Indirect Effects of Peer Victimization on Anger

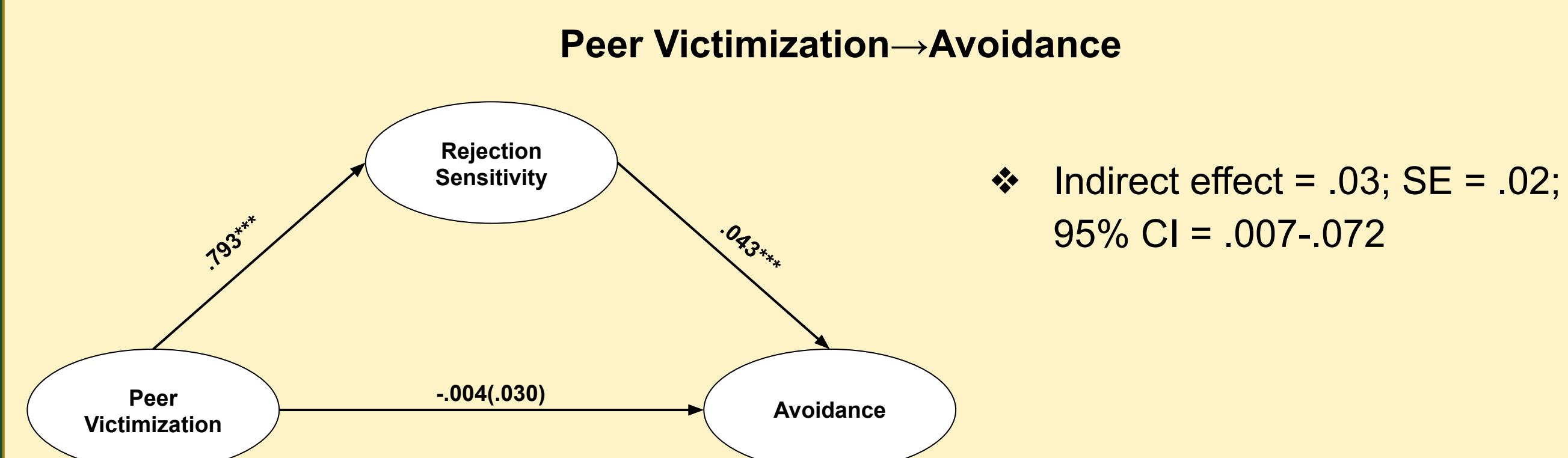


Figure 2: Direct and Indirect Effects of Peer victimization on Avoidance

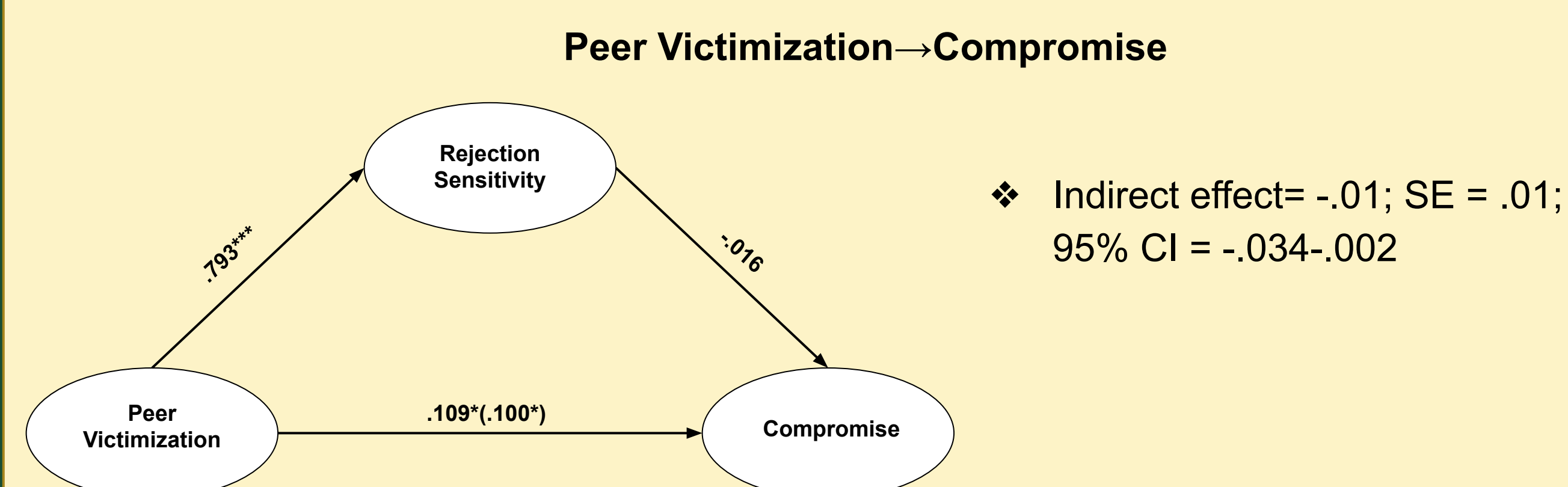


Figure 3: Direct and Indirect Effects of Peer Victimization on Compromise

Discussion

Summary of findings

- ❖ Greater peer victimization was directly associated with greater compromise and was indirectly related to greater avoidance and anger via rejection sensitivity.
- ❖ Unexpectedly, participants who reported more peer victimization in adolescence were more likely to report compromise resolution tactics.

Implications

- ❖ Childhood peer victimization may lead to heightened social anxiety surrounding relationships (McCabe et al., 2010), causing individuals to compromise more in romantic relationships.
- ❖ Alternatively, peer victimization and rejection sensitivity may lead to lower self esteem/confidence in emerging adulthood which in turn may cause individuals to compromise more (Chuang et al., 2013).
- ❖ Further mediation analyses should be conducted with longitudinal data in order to investigate the role that anxiety and/or low self esteem may have in mediating the relationship between peer victimization and compromise.
- ❖ Additionally, future studies should test for protective factors (e.g. social support) that might mitigate the links between peer victimization and rejection sensitivity and, in turn, interrupt pathways from victimization to anger/avoidant conflict resolution tactics
- ❖ These findings could be used to help adolescents develop positive conflict resolution skills for future relationships, and could help lessen the link between peer victimization and maladaptive conflict resolution tactics.

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