



## Direct and indirect links between peer factors and adolescent adjustment difficulties



Michael M. Criss<sup>a,\*</sup>, Benjamin J. Houltberg<sup>b</sup>, Lixian Cui<sup>c</sup>, Cara D. Bosler<sup>a</sup>,  
Amanda Sheffield Morris<sup>a</sup>, Jennifer S. Silk<sup>d</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Oklahoma State University, USA

<sup>b</sup> Fuller School of Psychology, USA

<sup>c</sup> New York University Shanghai, China

<sup>d</sup> University of Pittsburgh, USA

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 18 December 2014

Received in revised form 14 December 2015

Accepted 5 January 2016

Available online 3 February 2016

#### Keywords:

Adolescents

Emotion regulation

Antisocial behavior

Depression

Peer relationships

### ABSTRACT

The purpose of the current investigation was to examine the role of emotion regulation in the link between peer factors and adolescent adjustment difficulties. The sample consisted of 206 adolescents (ages 10–18 years) and parents. Peer factors (i.e., peer antisocial behavior, peer co-rumination, peer emotion regulation) and youth depressive symptoms were based on youth reports. Youth emotion regulation and antisocial behavior were assessed using parent and youth ratings. Results showed that peer antisocial behavior was directly (but not indirectly) related to youth antisocial behavior and depressive symptoms, whereas peer emotion regulation was indirectly (but not directly) related to both adolescent outcomes. In addition, peer co-rumination was indirectly related to youth antisocial behavior and directly and indirectly related to youth depressive symptoms. In general, the results indicated little evidence of moderation by adolescent age, sex, or ethnic differences. Implications for peer relationships as socialization contexts are discussed.

© 2016 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

There has been considerable evidence in the literature connecting peer relationships to adolescent psychopathology (Dishion & Patterson, 2006; Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 2006; Snyder, 2002). For example, a number of peer factors (e.g., peer relationship quality, co-rumination, peer antisocial behavior) have been linked to both externalizing and internalizing problems (e.g., antisocial behavior, depression; Hankin, Stone, & Wright, 2010; Laird, Criss, Pettit, Dodge, & Bates, 2008; Rose, 2002). Although friendships appear to be key predictors of adolescent adjustment, less is understood regarding the processes and mechanisms underlying these links. One potential mechanism may be the adolescent's own emotion regulation as studies have demonstrated that youth emotion regulation is linked to both peer factors (e.g., Adrian et al., 2009; Kelly, Schwartz, Gorman, & Nakamoto, 2008) and adolescent adjustment (e.g., Eisenberg, Morris, & Spinrad, 2008; Kliewer et al., 2004; Silk et al., 2011). Another issue that remains unresolved is whether the pathways between peer processes and adolescent adjustment vary depending on adolescent age, sex, and ethnicity. The purpose of the current investigation was to examine whether peer factors were directly or indirectly (via youth emotion regulation) related to adolescent antisocial behavior and depressive symptoms. We also explored whether these links were moderated by adolescent age, sex, or ethnicity.

Adolescence is the developmental period consisting of the second decade of life (ages 10–18 years) that is characterized by a number of developmental transformations (Steinberg, 2014; Steinberg & Morris, 2001). For instance, compared to younger children, adolescents typically spend more time with friends (often unsupervised by adults), report greater levels of intimacy and companionship, and are more likely to identify trust and loyalty as defining features of their relationships with peers (Berndt, 2002; Buhrmester, 1998; Rubin et al., 2006). It is, therefore, not surprising that peer relationships have been identified as important socialization contexts in the development of adjustment difficulties, such as antisocial behavior and depression (Dishion & Patterson, 2006; Rubin et al., 2006; Snyder, 2002). Although the specific dimensions of peer relationships and methods of assessment have varied, social scientists have posited a number of ways that adolescents' friends may influence psychopathology. For instance, peers may shape the development of adjustment difficulties by serving as role models (positive and negative) and through the reinforcement and/or affirmation of certain maladaptive behavioral and cognitive styles (e.g., deviant behavior, rumination; Dishion, Spracklen, Andrews, & Patterson, 1996; Rose, 2002). Specifically, some authors have highlighted peer relationships as contexts for deviancy training where children and adolescents essentially learn how to be aggressive and antisocial (Dishion et al., 1996). In addition to deviancy training, peers may encourage the rumination of negative thoughts and moods through co-rumination (e.g., Hankin et al., 2010; Rose, 2002) which can increase the risk for

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: michael.criss@okstate.edu (M.M. Criss).

depressive symptoms. Adolescents' friends also may shape the development of adjustment difficulties by introducing them to delinquent-reinforcing contexts and situations, such as violence and drug use in neighborhoods and schools (Snyder, 2002), which may increase both adolescent stress (and thus depressive symptoms) and deviant behavior.

Regardless of the process or manner in which peers influence adolescent development, there is considerable empirical evidence linking peer factors to both antisocial behavior and depression. For instance, Laird et al. (2008) reported that friend antisociality (adolescent reports) was positively and significantly related to adolescent delinquent behavior (adolescent and parent reports). These findings are consistent with a study by Fergusson, Swain-Campbell, and Horwood (2002) who found that high levels of deviant peer association (adolescent reports) were related to high levels of adolescent self-reports of violent and property crimes. Peer interactions also may influence the development of internalizing problems. For instance, different research groups (e.g., Hankin et al., 2010; Rose, 2002) have examined the link between peer co-rumination and adolescent adjustment. Given its positive (i.e., self-disclosure) and negative (i.e., rumination) features, it is not surprising that co-rumination has been linked to high levels of both internalizing problems and peer positive relationship quality (Hankin et al., 2010; Rose, 2002).

Although there is extensive evidence linking peer factors to adolescent adjustment, there have been few investigations examining potential pathways (i.e., direct and indirect) in this association. Examining direct and indirect pathways is important as it can inform the development of intervention programs targeting at-risk youth (Herts, McLaughlin, & Hatzenbuehler, 2012). One potential underlying mechanism linking peer processes and adjustment is *adolescent emotion regulation* (ER) which has been defined as the process of modulating the occurrence, form, intensity, and duration of internal feeling states and emotion-related physiological processes (Eisenberg & Morris, 2002). There is growing evidence that, compared to children, adolescents are better able to self-regulate and tend to use more advanced cognitive strategies when modulating their negative emotions (e.g., Morris, Silk, Steinberg, Myers, & Robinson, 2007). In addition, studies have shown that ineffective emotion regulation is an important predictor of many problems that emerge during adolescence (Dahl, 2004), such as risk taking behaviors, delinquency, and depression (Eisenberg et al., 2008; Kliewer et al., 2004; Silk et al., 2011).

Investigating adolescent emotion regulation as an underlying mechanism in the links between peer factors and adolescent behavior problems is based on the premise that friends serve as socializing agents in the development of emotion regulatory skills. For example, children have reported that friends may suppress or reinforce the expression of certain emotions, such as anger or sadness (Zeman & Garber, 1996). Likewise, friends can serve as role models for adaptive or maladaptive emotion regulatory skills (von Salisch, 2001). In addition to theoretical evidence, empirical findings from the literature have provided further support for the links between peer factors and emotion regulation. For instance, Rudolph, Troop-Gordon, and Flynn (2009) found that peer relational victimization (child reports) was positively and significantly related to observed emotion dysregulation. These findings are consistent with Kelly et al. (2008) who reported that peer nominations of bullying and rejection were positively and significantly related to teacher reports of adolescent emotion dysregulation. In sum, there is preliminary empirical and theoretical evidence that peer factors are related to adolescent emotion regulation, which in turn, is related to behavior problems. However, very few investigations have investigated direct and indirect (via youth emotion regulation) pathways between peer processes and adolescent adjustment. In research conducted by McLaughlin and Hatzenbuehler (Herts et al., 2012; McLaughlin & Hatzenbuehler, 2009; McLaughlin, Hatzenbuehler, & Hilt, 2009), the authors reported that peer victimization (youth reports) was indirectly (but not directly) related to adolescent aggression and internalizing

symptoms (parent and adolescent reports) via emotion dysregulation (parent and adolescent reports).

Although there is preliminary evidence that peer factors may be directly and indirectly related to adolescent behavior problems, it is possible that these pathways may vary by adolescent sex, age, and ethnicity. For example, there may be stronger links among older youth as they often report spending more time with their friends compared to younger adolescent (Larson & Richards, 1991). Indeed, Fleming, Catalano, Haggerty, and Abbott (2010) reported that adolescent perceptions of negative peer relationships at grade 9 (but not grade 5) predicted self-reports of substance use at age 19. There also is some evidence of ethnic differences regarding the impact of peer factors on adjustment. For example, using a sample of children in grades 3–5, Risi, Gerhardtstein, and Kistner (2003) reported that peer reports of social withdrawal were more strongly related to negative education outcomes (i.e., achievement tests) for African Americans compared to European Americans. With respect to sex differences, girls often report significantly higher levels of support, intimacy, and affection in their friendship compared to boys (Belle, 1989; Rose, 2002), suggesting the possibility of stronger direct effects for girls compared to boys. Although these findings suggest potential sex, age, and ethnic differences regarding the direct link between peer factors and adolescent adjustment, it is not clear whether there would be comparable differences with respect to indirect effects (via adolescent emotion regulation). In their research, McLaughlin and Hatzenbuehler (Herts et al., 2012; McLaughlin et al., 2009) reported no significant differences between boys and girls (aged 11–14 years) regarding direct and indirect effects. To the best of our knowledge, there have been no investigations examining age or ethnic differences regarding indirect effects, and it is unclear whether these findings would be replicated using other peer factors (e.g., peer antisocial behavior) and using a larger age span during adolescence. Clearly, more research is needed.

In sum, the existing literature has identified several peer factors as critical predictors of adjustment difficulties during adolescence. However, there are some notable gaps in the literature. First, there have been few investigations of the pathways underlying this link during adolescence. In addition, the few published studies that have investigated the indirect effects of emotion regulation (Herts et al., 2012; McLaughlin & Hatzenbuehler, 2009; McLaughlin et al., 2009) focused only on peer victimization without examining other potential peer factors (e.g., peer emotion regulation). We addressed these gaps in the literature with the following research goals. First, we examined whether peer processes were directly and indirectly (via youth emotion regulation) related to adolescent adjustment difficulties. Consistent with the recommendations of the peer relationship literature (Hartup, 1996), we focused on three peer factors: peer antisocial behavior, peer co-rumination, and peer emotion regulation. Also, given that peer factors have been linked to externalizing and internalizing problems (e.g., Rubin et al., 2006), we included two types of adolescent adjustment difficulties simultaneously in the model: antisocial behavior and depressive symptoms. Based on previous studies (Herts et al., 2012; McLaughlin et al., 2009), we expected to find evidence of direct and indirect effects. Second, we examined whether the direct and indirect effects differ across adolescent age, sex, and ethnicity. Based on the evidence (albeit limited) in the literature, it was expected tentatively that stronger links in the pathways would be found among older adolescents (compared to younger youth), girls (compared to boys), and ethnic minorities (compared to European Americans).

## Method

### Participants and procedure

The sample consisted of 206 families with adolescents who participated in the Family and Youth Development Project (Criss et al., 2015), a study of the predictors and outcomes of adolescent emotion

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/359595>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/359595>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)