



Social Support as a Moderator of the Effects of Loneliness on Emotional Eating in Parent-Adolescent Dyads



Ayumi Tachida, Jamie Zhang, and Ana DiGiovanni

Research Question

How does the **presence of social support** moderate actor and partner effects of **loneliness on emotional eating** in parent-adolescent dyads in the National Cancer Institute's Family Life, Activity, Sun, Health, and Eating (FLASHE) study?

Background

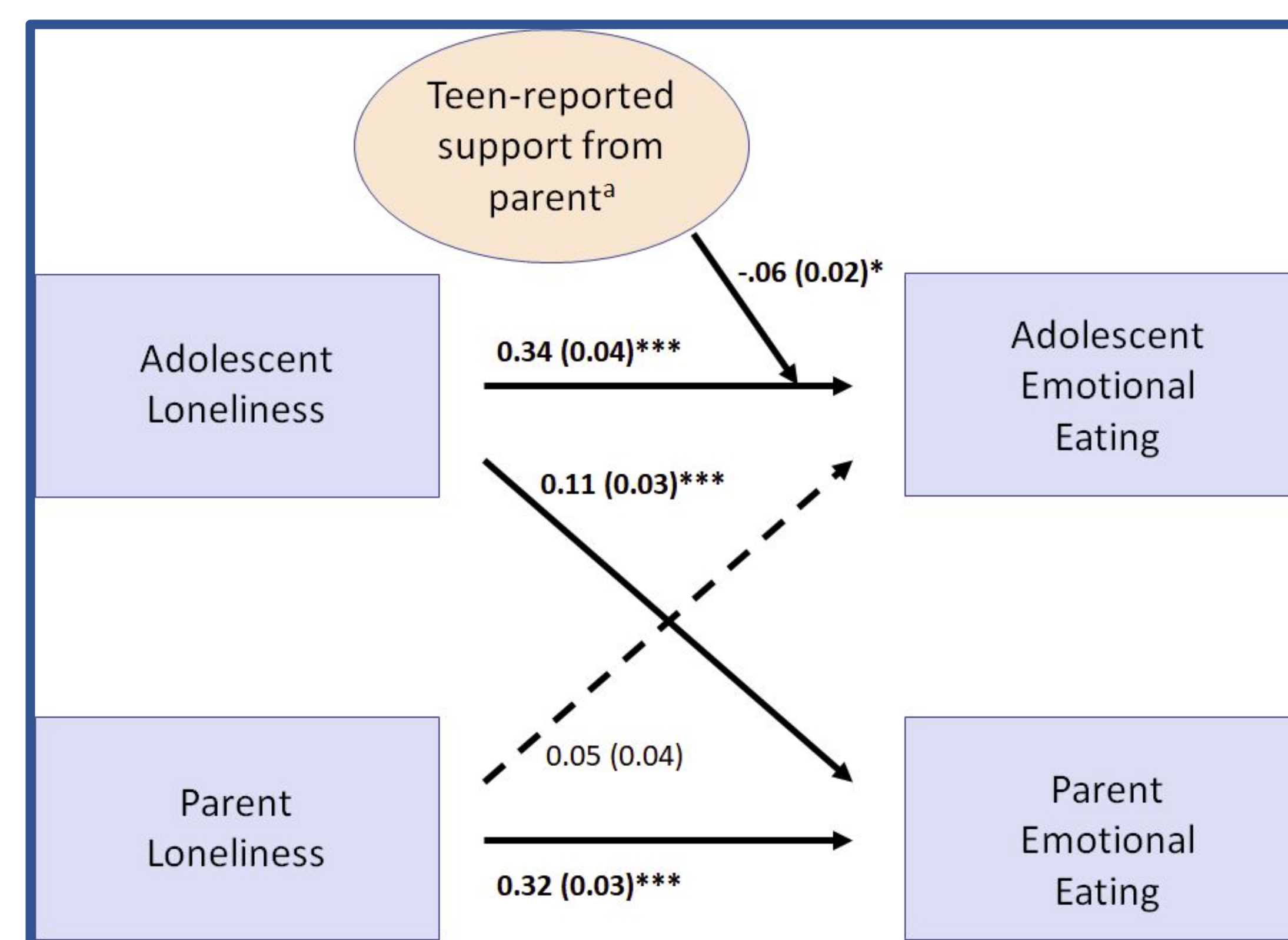
- Previous findings suggest the importance of examining support and loneliness as co-occurring individual- and dyadic-level correlates of eating behaviors among parent-adolescent dyads (Welch et al., 2019)
- Loneliness is associated with adverse health outcomes (Hawkey & Cacioppo, 2010).
 - Among adults, loneliness has been linked to more emotional eating (Ford et al., 2017; Grenard et al., 2013; Hawkey et al., 2009)
 - Loneliness may be transmitted within social networks & in close dyads (i.e. contagion) (Cacioppo et al., 2009; Segrin et al., 2003)
 - Adolescents' and their parents' loneliness could influence each others' eating through the instrumental role of the parent in providing food or bidirectional influences on emotional state.
- Emotional eating can be conceptualized as a secondary emotion regulation strategy (Ferrer et al., 2017) and is a risk factor for binge eating.
- Support, which is asymmetrically provided in the adolescent - parent relationship, may buffer the effects of loneliness on emotional eating and/or may have costs for the provider.
 - Loneliness seems to have individual and dyad-level effects on emotional eating in parent-adolescent dyads (Mason 2020), **but the role of support in these effects is unknown.**

Procedure/Measures

- Secondary analysis of the FLASHE dataset, an online survey of parent-adolescent dyads, was conducted using Actor-Partner Interdependence Modeling with the nlme package in R
- All analyses controlled for subjects' sex and BMI

Measure	Sample Item (From Adolescent Surveys)
Loneliness	How often do you feel isolated from others?
Emotional Eating	How often do YOU start or continue to eat when YOU'RE not hungry because you feel sad and depressed?
Social Support	I can count on my parent(s) to help me out if I have a problem

Figure



*** $p < .0001$, ** $p < .001$, * $p < .05$

Actor Partner Interdependence Model for the Effects of Loneliness on Emotional Eating

^aSocial support moderation of the effect of loneliness on emotional eating for parent-adolescent dyads. Only moderation of adolescent-reported parent support on adolescent loneliness and emotional eating was significant.

Conclusions

- Consistent with previous research, greater individual-level loneliness predicts increased emotional eating.
- Unlike previous research, only the partner effect of adolescent loneliness on parental emotional eating was supported after controlling for BMI and sex.
- Adolescent-reported support significantly moderated the relationship between adolescent loneliness and adolescent emotional eating, suggesting that parental support can be protective against disordered eating. However, parent-reported support did not have any effect.
- There was a significant main effect of adolescent-reported social support on adolescent emotional eating, but no other main effects of giving or receiving social support.

Results

Main Effects of Loneliness on Emotional Eating

	Adolescent Emotional Eating		Parent Emotional Eating	
	B (SE)	p	B (SE)	p
Adolescent loneliness	0.34 (0.04)	< .0001	0.11 (0.03)	.0002
Parent loneliness	0.05 (0.04)	.199	0.32 (0.03)	< .0001

Moderation Effects of Social Support on Loneliness

	Adolescent Emotional Eating		Parent Emotional Eating	
	B (SE)	p	B (SE)	p
Adolescent loneliness * parental support (teen-reported)	-0.06 (0.02)	.0190	0.02 (0.02)	.3734
Adolescent loneliness * parental support (parent-reported)	-0.07 (0.06)	.2366	-0.07 (0.06)	.2574
Parent loneliness * parental support (teen-reported)	0.02 (0.03)	.5359	-0.002 (0.03)	.9300
Parent loneliness * parental support (parent-reported)	0.08 (0.06)	.1812	0.05 (0.06)	.4670