


**1 in 5 children in  
China are  
Bullied.**

(Han et al., 2017)

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**1 in 5 children in  
the U.S. are bullied  
as well.** (NCES, 2019)

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# **Positive Psychology Traits, Victimization & Bullying in Chinese Elementary School Students**

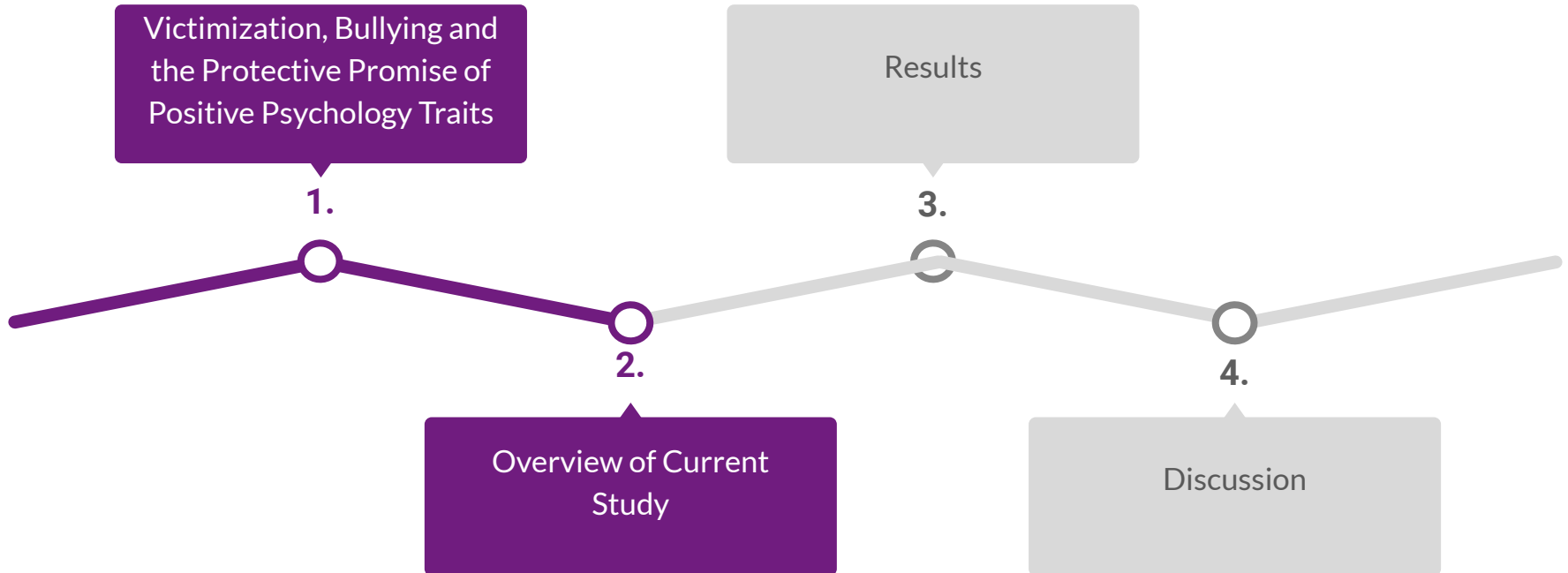
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University of Maryland College Park



# Roadmap



# BACKGROUND

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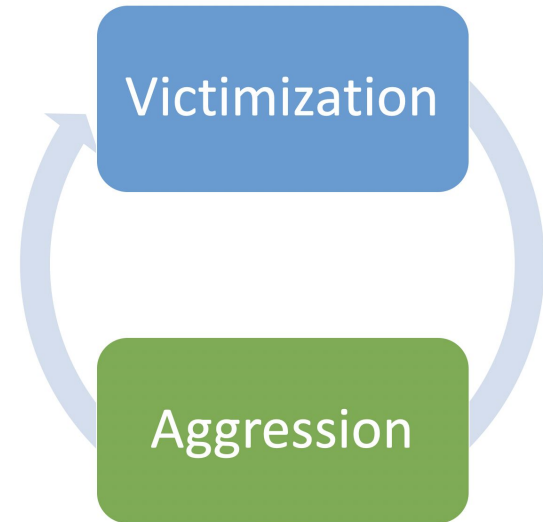


# Bullying & Victimization

- Bullying is defined as “aggressive goal-directed behavior that harms another individual within the context of a power imbalance” (Volk et al., 2014).
  - Relational bullying, verbal bullying, physical bullying, cyber bullying, sexual bullying, prejudicial bullying
- Victimization’s effects are largely negative; depressed and anxious adolescents are more likely to have a history of being bullied (Ttofi et al., 2011)
- Increased prevalence of peer victimization in Chinese context (Huang et al., 2013).

# Bullying & Victimization

- Victimization may lead to internalizing symptoms and later aggression due to lack of alternative coping mechanisms and hostile attribution bias (Kaynak et al., 2015; Sullivan et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2014)
- Reciprocal relationship between victimization and aggression in both Chinese and Western contexts (Lam et al., 2018)





# What are Positive Psychology (PP) Traits?

- Positive psychology: “the study of the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people, groups, and institutions” (Gable & Haidt, 2005)
  - What helps things “go right” for people’s well-being?
    - Some psychological constructs that have been studied: meaning-making, gratitude, optimism, joy, forgiveness, belongingness, savoring...



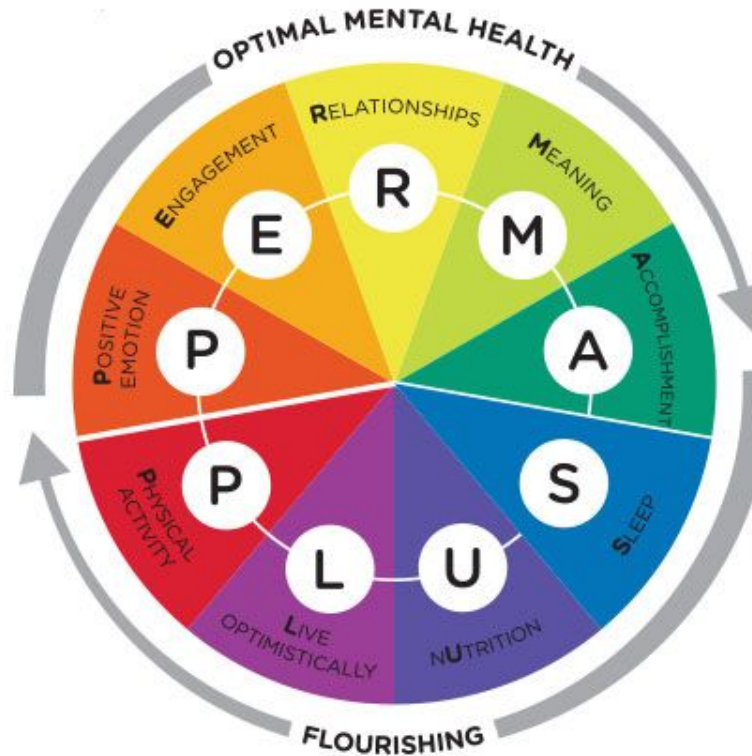
# Positive Psychology Influences in Bullying Impact & Perpetration

- Resilience framework: positive psychological orientations support positive youth development, would likely reduce frequency and impact of bullying (Masten et al. 2008)
- This is not to say that PP is the solution to all adverse environments! (“Just look on the bright side...and deny your problems!”)
- Toxic positivity vs. optimism (Sokal et al., 2020)

Toxic Positivity	Genuine Optimism
being negative won't help you	it's important to let it out. is there anything i can do to make this easier for you?
good vibes only	i love you through all your emotional states
you'll get over it	you are so resilient, and your strength will get you through it
other people have it a lot worse	you are not alone, and there is support to help you
smile, crying won't help	it's okay to cry, we all do. can i get you a tissue or a hug?
just stay positive	things are tough right now. do you wanna talk about it or do something lighthearted?

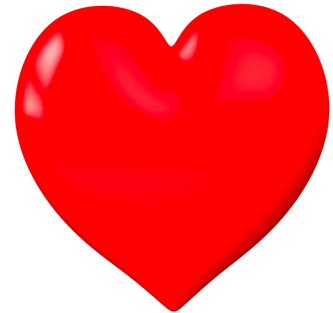
# PERMA+ Model

(Seligman, 2018)



## PP Constructs in this Study: Covitality & Belonging

- Covitality: is a co-occurrence of positive psychological building blocks, including: gratitude, zest, optimism and persistence (Furlong et al., 2013).
- Belonging: combination of students' feelings of respect, inclusion, and support within the school environment (Goodenow, 1993, p. 80).
  - Encompasses three factors: caring relations, sense of acceptance, sense of rejection (You et al., 2011).





## PP Constructs in this Study: Belonging

- Positive psychology orientations found to mediate the effects of victimization on adolescent emotional problems (Arslan et al., 2021)
- Feelings of school belonging can:
  - reduce bullying perpetration (Slaten et al., 2019)
  - reduce internalizing symptomatology in cases of victimization (Arslan, 2021)
- Previous work in this same sample, in Chinese context, showed that **belonging, covitality independently predicted victimization's negative longitudinal impacts on loneliness** (Wang et al., 2021)
  - Students who experienced more bullying victimisation, lower levels of school belonging, and lower covitality reported more loneliness 6 months later.



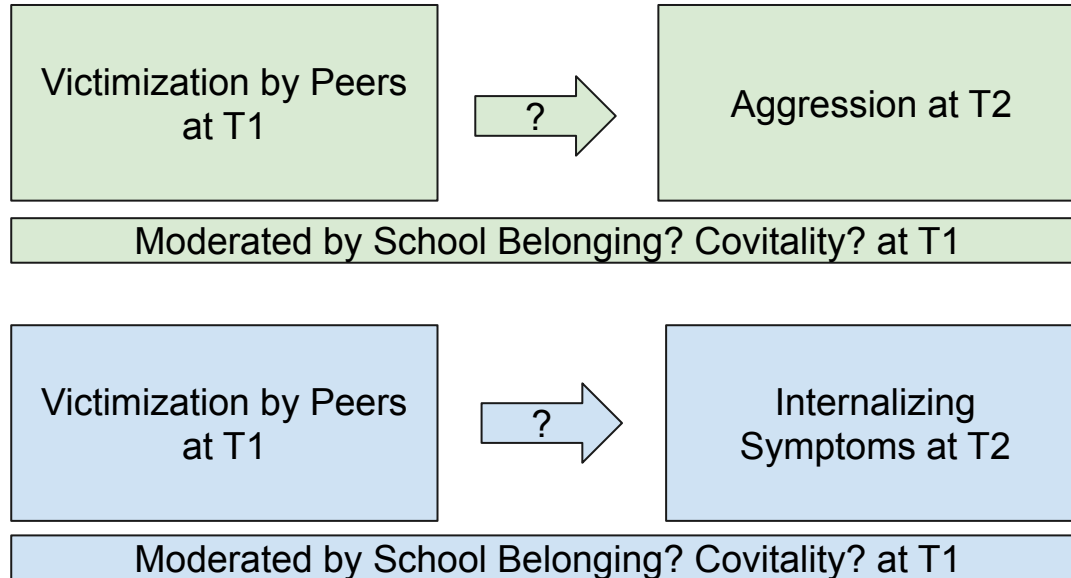
## Chinese Cultural Norms Relevant to this Study

- Aggression could be particularly problematic in the Chinese context, which typically values social harmony and places emphasis on self-regulation (Chen & French, 2008; Jia et al., 2009)
  - Adults and children could both reject more aggressive children
- Chinese schools typically emphasize building student-teacher relationships; children tend to have the same classroom for multiple years (Chen & French, 2008)
- Chinese students typically feel more respect for teachers (Jia et al., 2009), which likely comes from the Confucian ideal of respecting folx in authority (Hui et al., 2011)

# CURRENT STUDY

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## Research Questions





## Participants & Measures

- 510, 4<sup>th</sup> grade students ( $M_{age}$  at T1 = 9.69, 47.1% female) from 4 schools in Sichuan, China
- Data collected in November 2016 and May 2017 , 22% attrition rate: final sample ~400
- Parents – ~50% university educated, 50% high school or less
- 3% of the children had no working parents.
- 19% of the children had only permanently employed parent (17% was just father).
- 78% had two working parents.

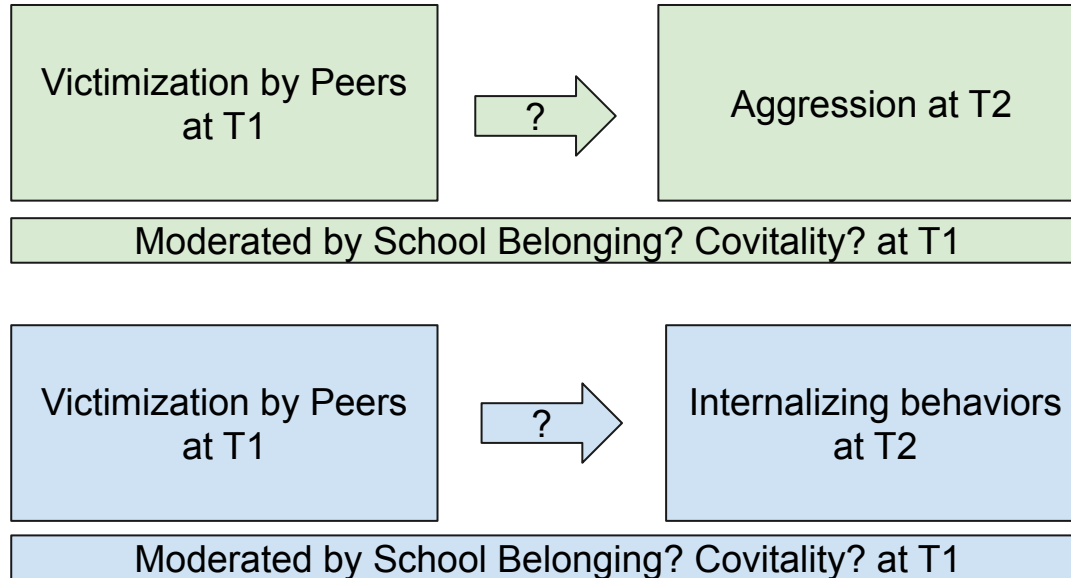




## Participants & Measures

- Measures of:
  - School Belonging, *Psychological Sense of School Membership Chinese*.
  - Covitality, *Social Emotional Health Survey-Primary-Chinese Version*.
  - Bullying Victimization, *Delaware Bullying Victimization Scale-Student-Chinese*
  - Aggression, *Me and My School (MMS), Chinese*
  - Internalizing Behaviors, *Me and My School (MMS), Chinese*

# Regression Models



Covariates included:

- Age,
- Father employment
- Mother employment
- Child Sex

# Model 1: Aggression predicted by Victimization, PP traits?

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## Descriptives (n=375, listwise deletion)

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Possible Min-Max
Aggression @ Time 2	1.4047	0.38447	1-3 Likert scale
Victimization @ Time 1	1.8698	1.00302	1-6 Likert scale
Covitality @ Time 1	5.028	0.8833	1-6 Likert Scale
Belonging @ Time 1	4.5095	0.82058	1-6 Likert scale



## Correlations (n=375, listwise deletion)

	Aggression T2	Covitality T1	Belonging T1	Victimization T1
Aggression T2	1	-.349**	-.308**	.311**
Covitality T1		1	.692**	-.231**
Belonging T1			1	-.227**
Victimization T1				1

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

## Results - Predicting Aggression at T2

	Unstandardized B	Std. Error	Standardized Beta	t	Sig.	Effect (partial $\eta^2$ )
(Constant)	1.137	0.388		2.933	0.004	.023
Victimization @ Time 1*	0.254	0.115	0.663	2.204	0.028	.013 (Small)
Covitality * Victimization	0.026	0.024	0.333	1.053	0.293	.003
Belonging * Victimization*	-0.067	0.032	-0.763	-2.06	0.04	.011 (Small)
Covitality @ Time 1*	-0.144	0.061	-0.33	-2.356	0.019	.015 (Small)
Belonging @ Time 1	0.08	0.069	0.171	1.156	0.248	.004
Sex=Male	0.05	0.037	0.065	1.372	0.171	.005
Father Regularly Employed	0.119	0.073	0.079	1.629	0.104	.007
Mother Regularly Employed	-0.072	0.047	-0.074	-1.544	0.123	.006
Age (@ Time 1)	0.04	0.024	0.081	1.646	0.101	.007

- Victimization at T1 predicts Aggression at T2

- Belonging moderates this relationship (is a buffer)

- Covitality at T1 negatively predicts aggression at T2, independently of victimization's effects

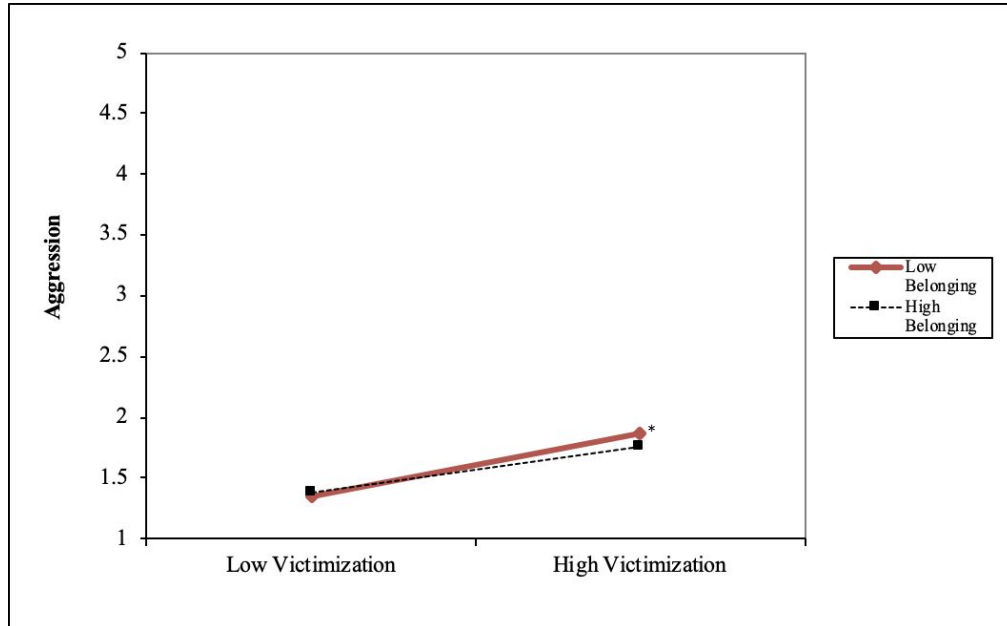
- At any level of victimization, covitality helps protect against later aggressive behavior

$\eta^2 = .01$  indicates a small effect.  
 $\eta^2 = .06$  indicates a medium effect.  
 $\eta^2 = .14$  indicates a large effect.

**What do you make of these findings around aggression?**

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## Interaction Effects - Belonging(t1) \* Victimization(t1)



- Belonging is protective at higher levels of victimization → as victimization increases, children with higher belonging develop less aggression.
- I.e. – Belonging seems to buffer against the relationship between victimization and later aggression



## Model 2: Internalizing predicted by Victimization, PP traits?

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## Descriptives (n=375, listwise deletion)

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Possible Min-Max
Internalizing @ Time 2	1.5144	0.40202	1-3 Likert scale
Victimization @ Time 1	1.8698	1.00302	1-6 Likert scale
Covitality @ Time 1	5.028	0.8833	1-6 Likert Scale
Belonging @ Time 1	4.5095	0.82058	1-6 Likert scale



## Correlations (n=375, listwise deletion)

	Internalizing T2	Covitality T1	Belonging T1	Victimization T1
Internalizing T2	1	-.301**	-.321**	.387**
Covitality T1		1	.692**	-.231**
Belonging T1			1	-.227**
Victimization T1				1

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Covitality & belonging appear to be protective.

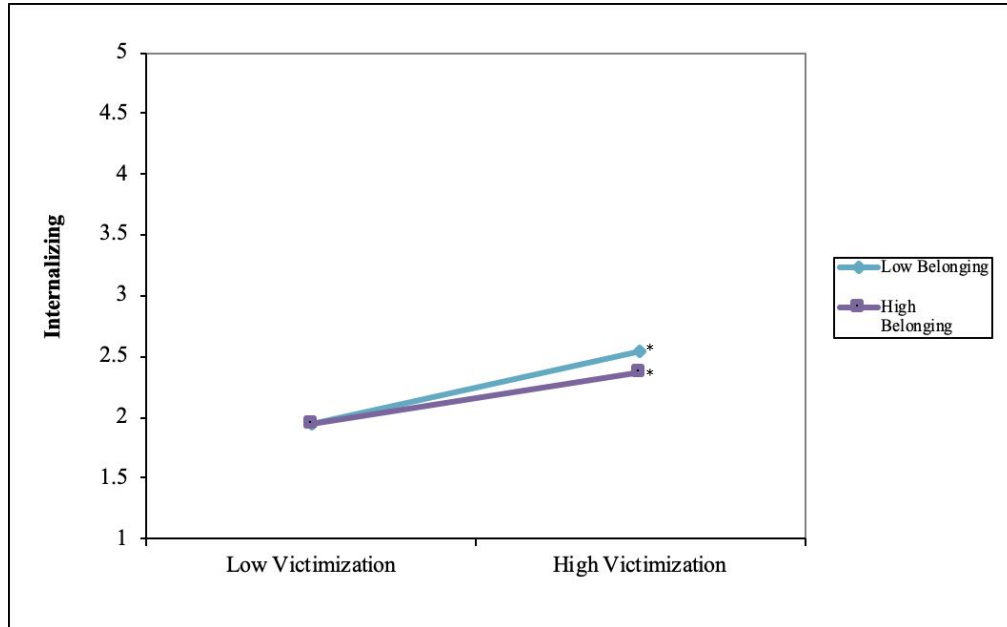
## Results - Predicting Internalizing Behavior at T2

	Unstandardized B	Std. Error	Standardized Beta	t	Sig.	Effect (partial eta <sup>2</sup> )
(Constant)	1.685	0.397		4.246	<.001	.047
Victimization @ Time 1*	0.297	0.118	0.741	2.515	0.012	.017 (Small)
Covitality * Victimization	0.044	0.025	0.547	1.768	0.078	.008
Belonging * Victimization*	-0.086	0.033	-0.942	-2.598	0.01	.018 (Small)
Covitality @ Time 1*	-0.154	0.062	-0.339	-2.476	0.014	.017 (Small)
Belonging @ Time 1	0.081	0.071	0.166	1.145	0.253	.004
Sex=Male*	-0.089	0.037	-0.11	-2.362	0.019	.015 (Small)
Father Regularly Employed	0.079	0.075	0.05	1.051	0.294	.003
Mother Regularly Employed	-0.022	0.048	-0.022	-0.46	0.646	.001
Age (@ Time 1)	-0.002	0.025	-0.004	-0.081	0.935	.000

- Victimization at T1 predicts Internalizing Symptoms at T2
  - *Belonging buffers this relationship*
- Covitality at T1 negatively predicts aggression at T2
  - *At any level of victimization, covitality helps protect against later internalizing behavior*
- Being male negatively predicts internalizing symptoms at T2

$\eta^2 = .01$  indicates a small effect.  
 $\eta^2 = .06$  indicates a medium effect.  
 $\eta^2 = .14$  indicates a large effect.

## Interaction Effects - Belonging(t1) \* Victimization(t1)



- Belonging is protective at higher levels of victimization → as victimization increases, children with higher belonging develop fewer internalizing symptoms.
- I.e. – Belonging seems to buffer against the relationship between victimization and later internalizing symptoms

**What do you make of these findings  
around internalizing symptoms?**

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# IMPLICATIONS

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## **“Bottom Line” Takeaways**

- Replicated the results that victimization can lead to subsequent aggression, internalizing symptoms
- Sex difference in the Chinese context with regards internalizing symptoms, but not aggression – females more likely to develop internalizing symptoms, but no difference in aggression development in males and female
- Covitality is protective no matter the level of victimization
- Belonging is protective at higher levels of victimization, buffers against its effects





# My Theories, The Group's Theories

- How have you seen these takeaways manifest in students?
- Unique role of Chinese cultural norms when interpreting findings
- Limitations & future directions

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