



Adolescent Peer Trust as a Predictor of Parenting Behaviors in Adulthood: The Moderating Role of Parenting Stressors

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Introduction

- Recent research suggests that peer relationships in adolescence may contribute to caregiving abilities later in adulthood, such as parenting (Stern et al., 2024)
- Adolescence is a critical period for practicing caregiving behaviors horizontally for the first time, outside of the family context
- Building trust in close friendships reflects core caregiving capacities including emotional safety, intimacy, and secure base functioning
- The present study examines whether peer-reported trust in adolescent close friendships predicts parenting behaviors in adulthood, and whether this early relational skill buffers against known parenting stressors: romantic partner dissatisfaction, loneliness, and child behavioral problems

Hypotheses

- Greater peer-reported trust in adolescent close friendships will predict fewer negative parenting responses in adulthood
- This association will be stronger among parents whose romantic partners report lower relationship satisfaction
- This association will be stronger among parents reporting greater loneliness in adulthood
- This will be stronger among parents whose children exhibit higher levels of problematic behavior

Participants

- Community sample of adolescents followed into adulthood
 - 85 male, 99 female
 - 58% White, 29% Black, 13% other racial identities
 - Median family income: \$40,000–\$59,999 range.
- At ages 15-17, target participants nominated a “closest friend” to complete peer reports
- At age 25, target participants and their romantic partner completed adult assessments
- Parenting assessments were completed by target participants with children ($M_{age} = 30.83$, $SD = 4.59$)

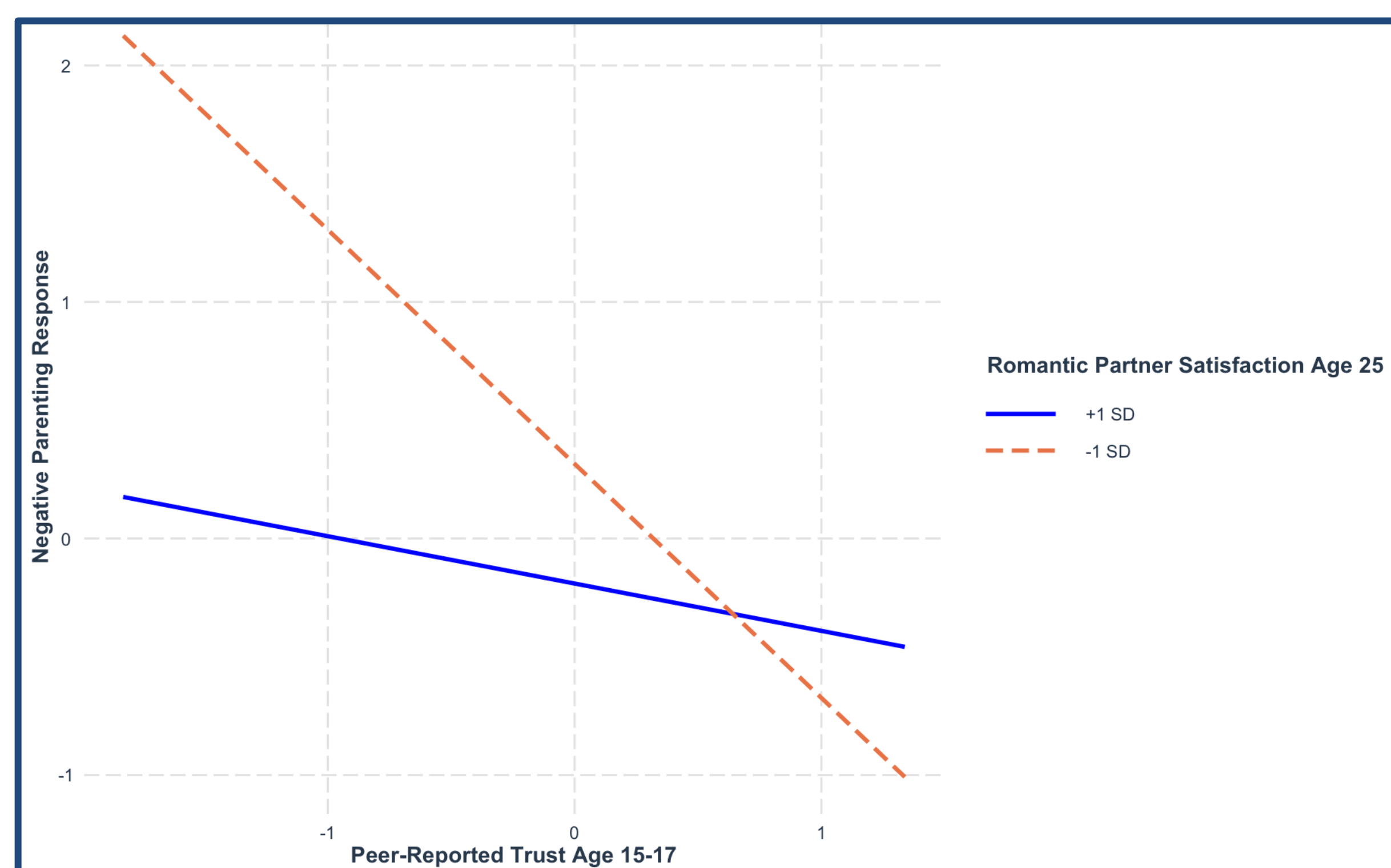


Figure 1. Interaction of Peer-Reported Trust and Romantic Partner Satisfaction on Negative Parenting Behaviors

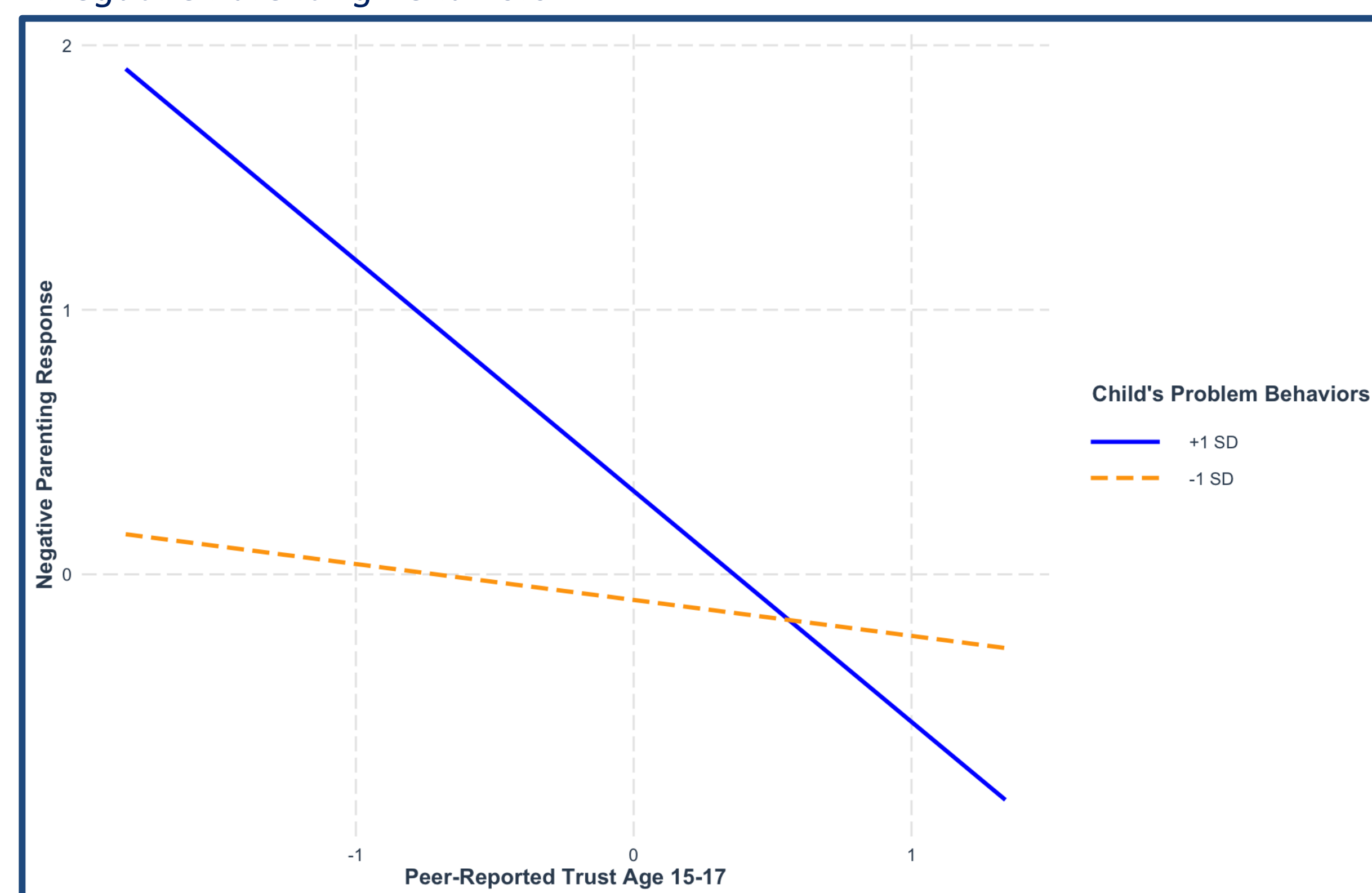


Figure 2. Interaction of Peer-Reported Trust and Child's Problem Behaviors on Negative Parenting Behaviors

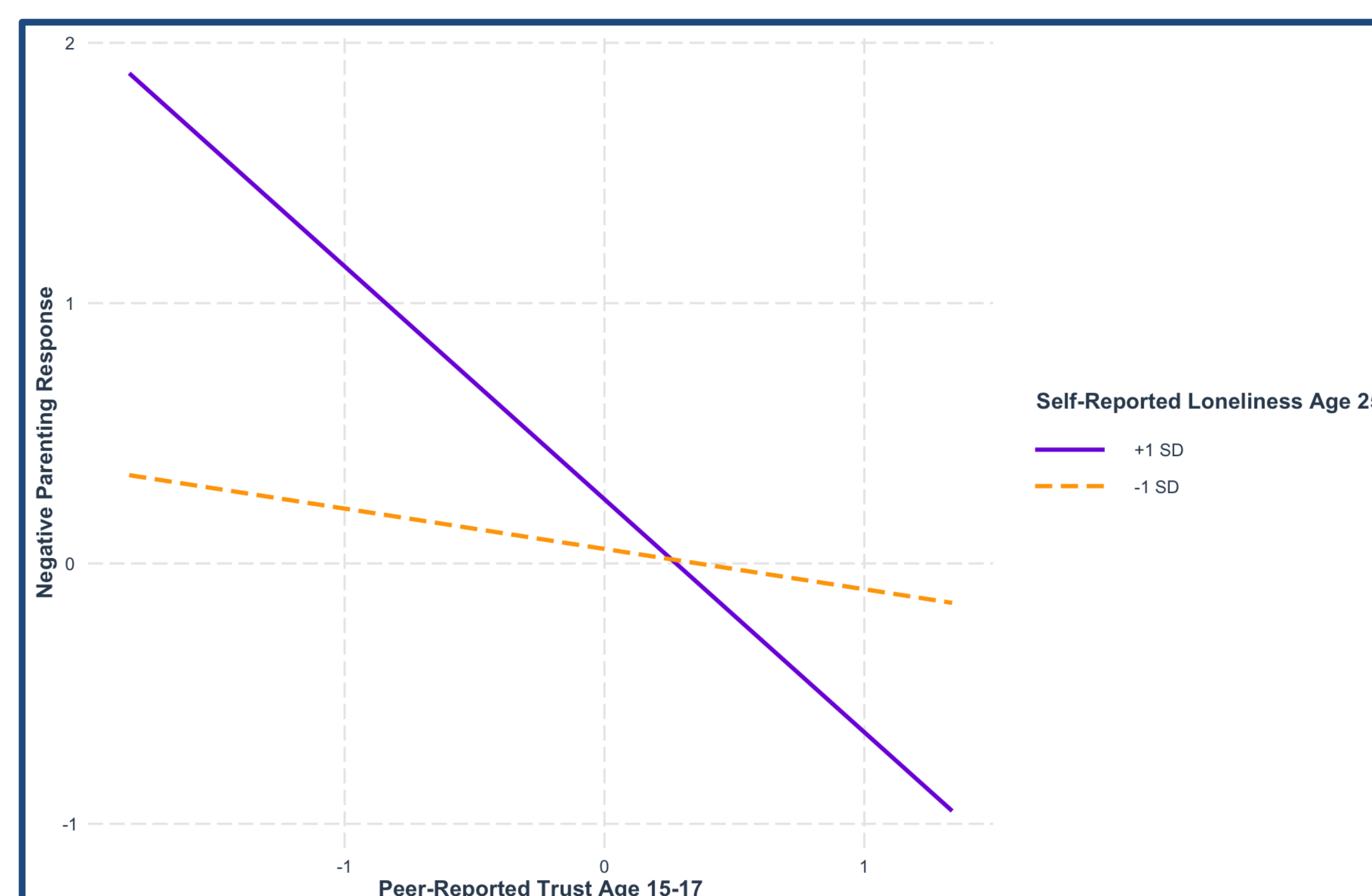


Figure 3. Interaction of Peer-Reported Trust and Loneliness on Negative Parenting Behaviors

Methods

- Peer-Reported Trust (Ages 15-17): Close friends completed the Trust subscale of the IPPA about the target participant
- Romantic Partner Satisfaction (Age ~25): Romantic Partners completed the 7-item Relationship Assessment Scale about their relationship with the target participant
- Loneliness (Age 25): Target participants completed the UCLA Loneliness Scale
- Child Problem Behaviors (Child Ages 3-8): Parents completed the Problem Behaviors subscale of the SSIS-RS about their child
- Negative Parenting (Child Ages 3-8): Parents completed the non-supportive subscale of the CCNES

Results

1. **Greater peer-reported trust at age 15-17 predicted fewer negative parenting responses in adulthood ($\beta = -0.524$, $p = .010$)**

The relationship between peer-reported trust and negative parenting responses was moderated by...

- Romantic partner satisfaction:** the association was stronger when partner satisfaction was low ($\beta = 0.36$, $p = .003$)
- Self-reported loneliness:** the association was stronger among parents reporting higher loneliness in adulthood ($\beta = -0.35$, $p = .002$)
- Child problem behaviors:** the association was stronger when children exhibited higher levels of behavioral problems ($\beta = -0.36$, $p = .033$)

Discussion

- Adolescents who were regarded as trustworthy by close friends were less likely to engage in negative parenting practices as adults, even under conditions of elevated stress
- The buffering effect of adolescent peer trust was strongest when parenting was hardest, such as when romantic relationships were distressed, when parents felt lonely, and when children were more behaviorally challenging
- These findings position adolescent friendships as a previously overlooked developmental pathway to parenting resilience

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