

# Understanding the Development of NSSI During Adolescence:

## Findings, Implications, and Recommendations

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## Developmental Perspectives

- Theoretical and empirical focus on broad, non-clinical samples
  - Community samples are used to understand broad patterns
- Focus on what hinders or promotes optimal growth – across forms and across contexts
- Analytical:
  - Patterns of change
  - Predictors of change (process)



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## Work using the 3 Cities Study

- Program of research focused on change in NSSI across adolescence
- TreStadStudien:
  - 5 annual assessments; 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade at 1<sup>st</sup>
  - Reports from adolescents, friends, and parents (2x)
  - Same measure of NSSI used in SoL
- Allows studying change in NSSI (albeit annual) and associated processes



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## Questions about change

What does change in NSSI during adolescence look like?

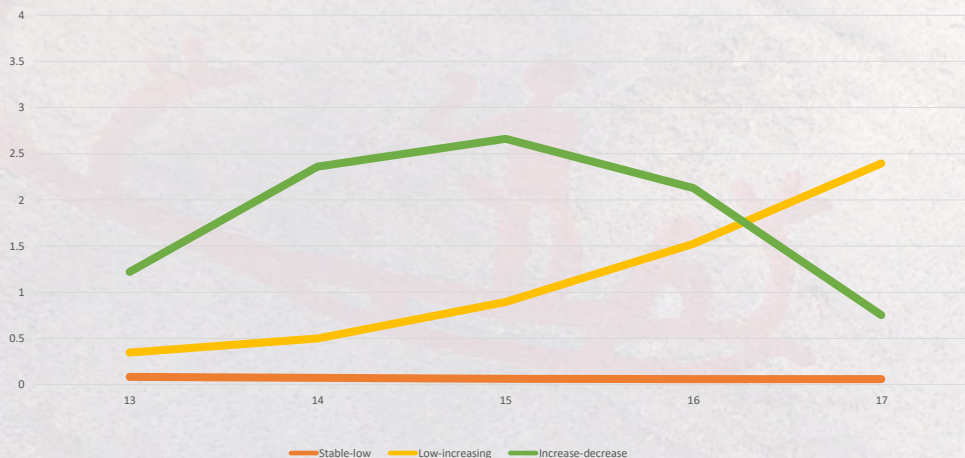
- Trajectories of change: variable- and person-centered

What is change in NSSI linked to?

- Links to intra-personal issues
  - Gender, emotion regulation
- Links to inter-personal experiences
  - Stressful experiences

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## Study 1: Trajectories of NSSI from Age 13 to 17

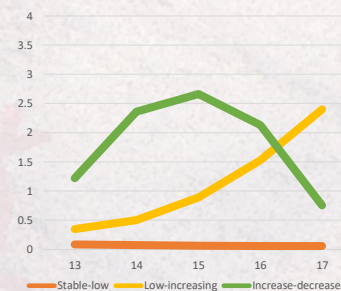


Tilton-Weaver, L.C., Latina, D., & Marshall, S.K.M. (2023). *Journal of Adolescence*, 94(3) 435-453.

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## Differences Across Trajectories

- Age 13 predictors:
  - Stable low < low-increasing < increase-decrease
    - Family-related stress
    - Victim of relational peer aggression
    - Internalizing (depressive, anxiety, low self-esteem)
  - Stable low < low-increasing/increase-decrease
    - Gender
    - Peer and school-related stress
    - Regulation problems (RNT, impulsivity)



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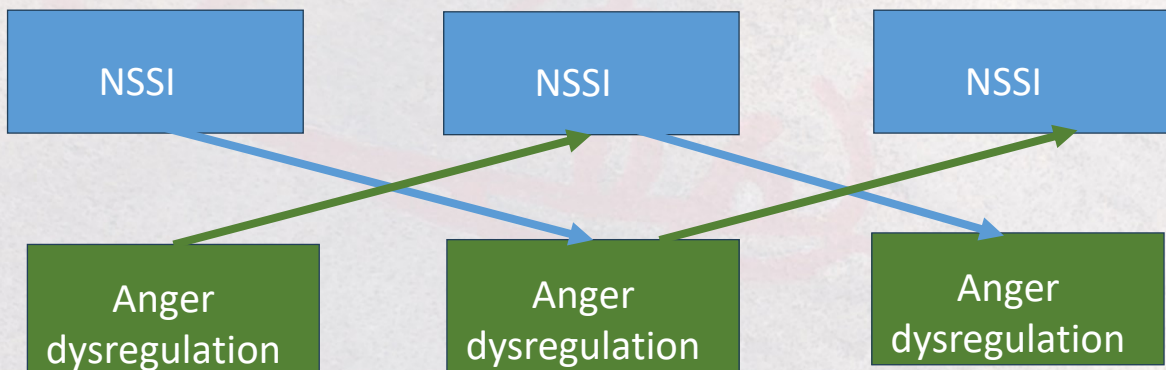
## Conclusions & Caveats

- Similar patterns later (age 16)
  - Stable low have least negative interpersonal issues and problematic intrapersonal characteristics
- What did we miss?
  - Adolescents who increase and then abate are not necessarily faring well
    - Indicators suggested continued interpersonal and intrapersonal problems
    - Process toward recovery? or
    - Increase in other dysregulated behaviors (substance use)?

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## Study 2: Anger dysregulation

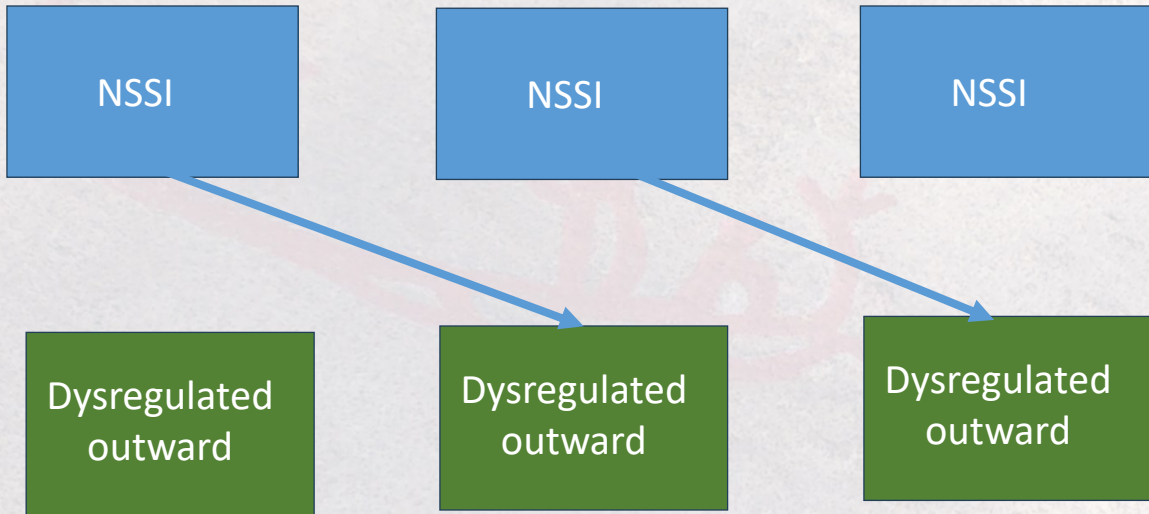
- Anger dysregulation is assumed to *cause* NSSI
- Direction questioned, tested by simultaneously examining



Larsson, J., Tilton-Weaver, L.C., Zhou, X. (2023). *Development & Psychopathology*, 1-10.

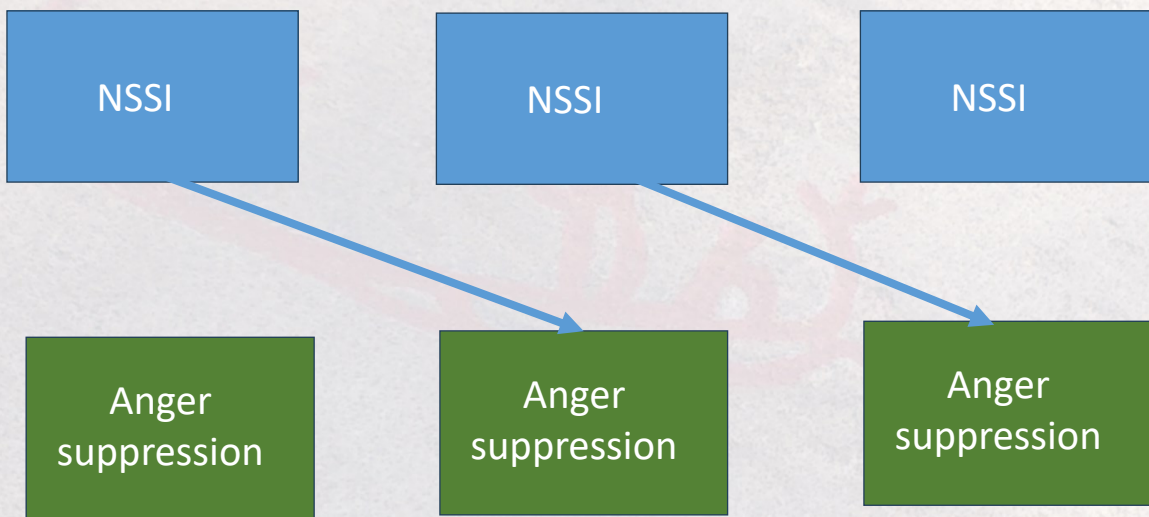
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## Path Model With Outward Expressions



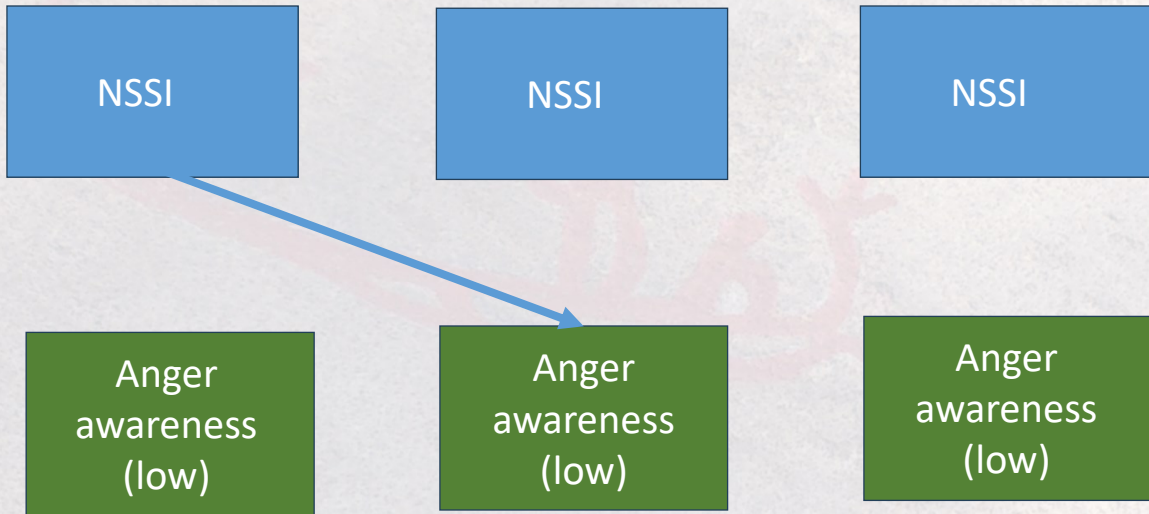
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## Path Model With Anger Suppression



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## Path Model With Low Anger Awareness



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## Conclusions & Caveats

- Engagement in NSSI is related to *increases* in dysregulated anger 1 year later
  - Consistent for outward expressions and anger suppression
  - Limited for low awareness between grades 7/8 and 8/9
- Why didn't anger dysregulation predict change in NSSI?
  - Null: May occur more closely in time (micro-temporal)
- We only examined three forms of anger dysregulation
  - Other emotional regulation to examine as well
    - Positive (restructuring)
    - "Negative" (shame?)

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## Avenues for prevention/promotion: Individual

- Targeted focus may include those whose NSSI looks like it's abating
- Validation of stressful experiences
- Programs aimed at helping adolescents develop emotion-regulation strategies in the face of abuse, rejection, emotionally-charged situations, and uncontrollable events
  - Teaching mindfulness?

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## Avenues for prevention/promotion: Contexts

- NSSI may indicate challenges in social contexts
- Home:
  - Community-based parenting programs focused on informing parents about adolescent development challenges and needs (e.g., CONNECT)
  - Therapeutic programs targeting parent dysfunction
  - Family-based therapy, including siblings when needed
- School:
  - Emotion-regulation education
  - Anti-aggression programs (e.g., KIVA) for peers
- Friendship groups
  - Dyad and cliques – unexplored, but my preliminary research suggests that there are avenues to NSSI through depressive symptoms of friends

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## Acknowledgments

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