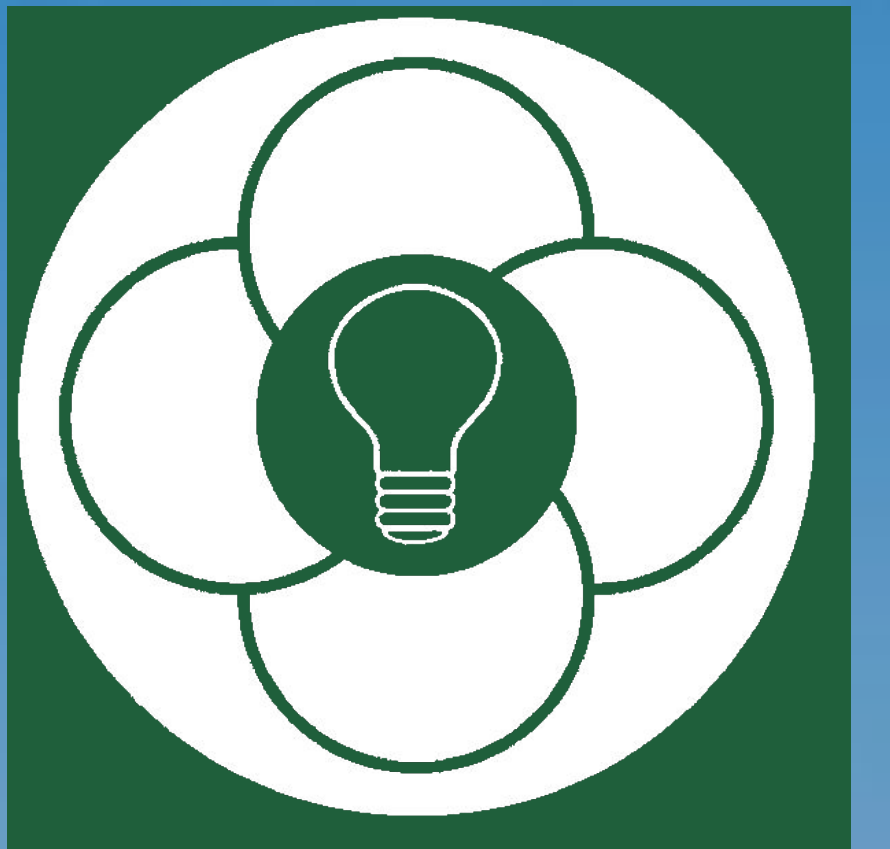


Interpersonal Problems and Demoralization in Undergraduate Students: The Role of Social Support

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Introduction

- Demoralization involves helplessness, hopelessness, and loss of meaning or purpose and is associated with psychological distress (Kissane et al., 2004; Robinson et al., 2016; Tecuta et al., 2015).
- Interpersonal problems may disrupt supportive relationships and effective coping (Alden et al., 1990; Israel & Langeveld, 2021).
- Social relationships may influence demoralization among college students (Huang et al., 2022).
- **Research Gap:** Limited research has examined specific interpersonal problems, social support, and demoralization in undergraduate students.
- **Present Study:** Examined whether vindictive/self-centered and intrusive/needy interpersonal problems predict demoralization, and whether social support mediates these relations.
- **Hypotheses:**
 - (H1) Higher levels of vindictive/self-centered and intrusive/needy interpersonal problems will significantly predict higher levels of loss of meaning/purpose and helplessness/hopelessness among undergraduate students.
 - (H2) Higher levels of perceived social support will significantly mediate the relationship between vindictive/self-centered and intrusive/needy interpersonal problems and demoralization.

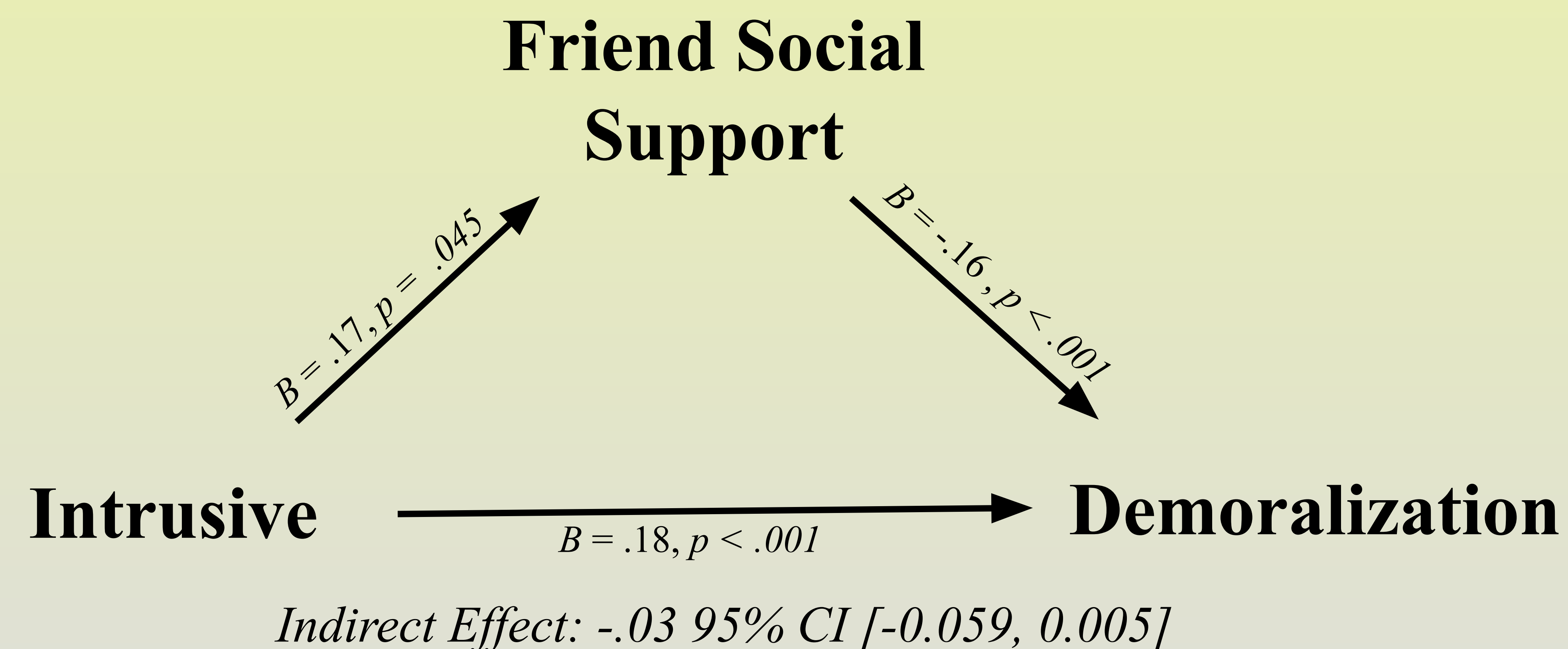
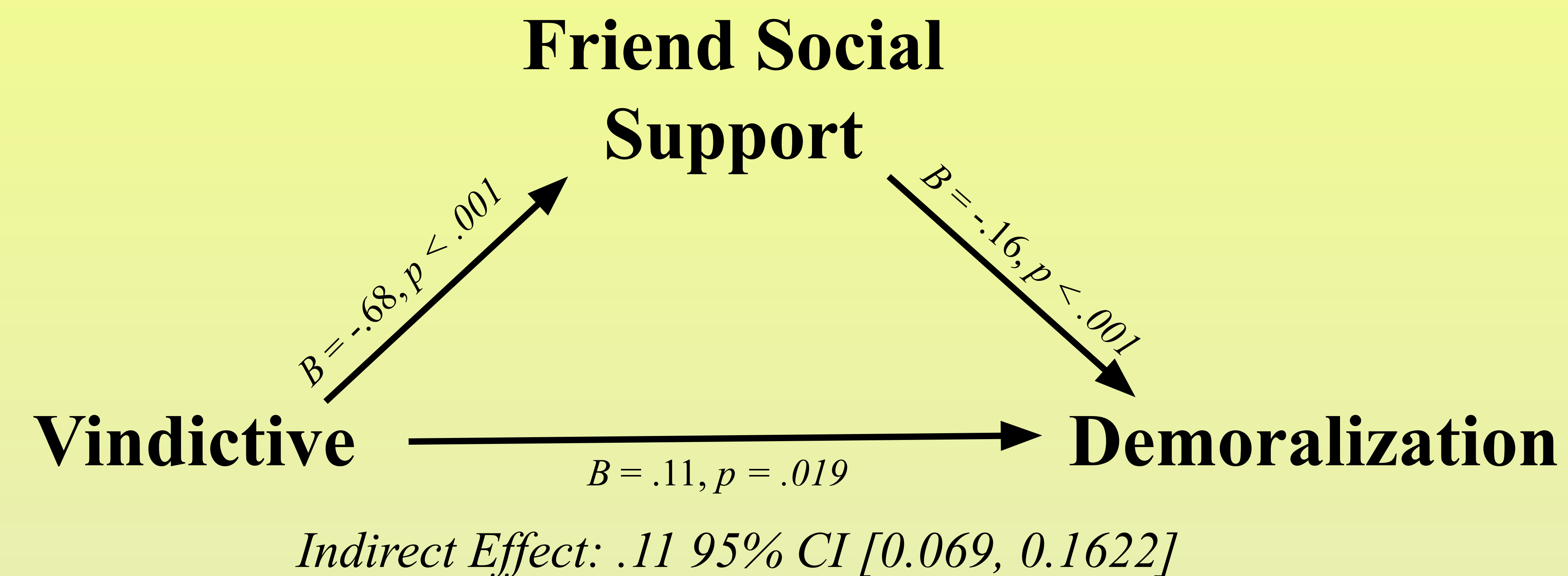
Materials and Methods

- Participants from the University of Texas ($N = 901$) completed an SONA online survey.
- Participants were $M = 20.69$ years old ($SD = 2.33$), and a majority female (64.2%).
- 59.6% of participants identified as European and American/White, 16.6% as African American/Black, and 15.2% as Hispanic/Latino/a.

Measures

- **Peri Demoralization Scale:** Assesses 6-month hopelessness/distress (0 = *None* to 4 = *Very often*). Higher scores = greater demoralization.
- **Inventory of Interpersonal Problems:** 64 items measuring interpersonal difficulties across 8 circumplex scales along 2 main axes (0 = *Not at all* to 4 = *Extremely*). Higher scores = greater difficulty.
- **Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support:** 12 items measuring subjective support (1 = *Very Strongly Disagree* to 7 = *Very Strongly Agree*). Higher scores = greater support.

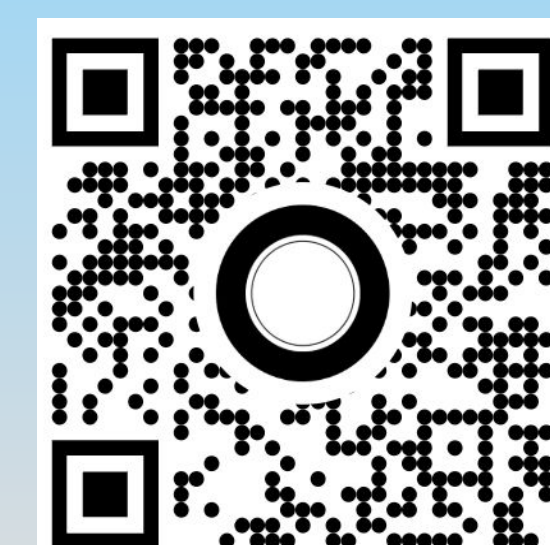
Results



Discussion

- **Main Result:**
 - Both vindictive/self-centered and intrusive/needy interpersonal problems were associated with greater demoralization among undergraduate students.
- **Mediation:**
 - When controlling for intrusive interpersonal problems, higher levels of vindictive interpersonal problems were associated with lower perceived friend social support, which in turn was associated with greater demoralization.
 - Vindictive interpersonal problems remained a significant predictor of demoralization after accounting for friend social support, supporting partial rather than complete mediation.
- **Vindictive vs Intrusive:**
 - When controlling for vindictive interpersonal problems, social support did not mediate the relation between intrusive interpersonal problems and demoralization, suggesting that vindictive interpersonal problems may have a more unique relation with demoralization (given the significant correlation between vindictive and intrusive interpersonal problems $r = .67$).
- **Implications:**
 - These findings suggest that supportive friendships may serve as a protective factor, but additional factors beyond social support also contribute to demoralization.
 - Strengthening peer support and healthy interpersonal relationships may help reduce demoralization among college students.

References



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Future Research Suggestions

- Examine the effect of social support as a mediator across different cultural and ethnic backgrounds.
- Examine whether Big Five personality traits are associated with or predict different types of interpersonal problems, providing further insight into individual differences in interpersonal functioning.