

# Examining how socialization processes mediate the relationship between aggression in young people and their attitudes to police legitimacy

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# Enhancing Police Legitimacy

- Police legitimacy is arguably a critical component of effective regulation of the public
  - Comprises public support for police and the rules they regulate, *and* the perception that the police are entitled to be obeyed
- Determining the antecedents of police legitimacy has important implications
- In recent years, this body of research has shifted towards understanding how these attitudes develop over the life course
  - Development of attitudes towards police conduct and normative expectations around how police should exert their powers



# A Lifecourse Approach to Understanding Police Legitimacy

- The years during childhood and adolescence are critical to young people's attitudes about authorities, including police
- Studies show that early developmental processes are important for determining how young people internalize norms, rules and laws, and how they interact with those who enforce them
- Prosocial factors (e.g., positive interactions with formal and informal agents of social control) can help children to develop rule-abiding tendencies
- Behavioral problems in children (e.g., aggression) that are not corrected as they age can be a precursor to future offending and the rejection of an authority's legitimacy



# The Impact of Aggression

- Aggressive behavior manifests early in a person's life and is normally age graded
- As children grow older and progress through stages of cognitive and emotional development, they normally learn how to regulate their behavior in a more acceptable manner
  - Manifestations of aggression, particularly physical aggression, become increasingly rare
- However, the persistence of aggression can influence the trajectory of rule and norm abiding behavior, the perception of those that enforce them as legitimate actors (e.g., police), and subsequent involvement in delinquency



# The Development of Attitudes towards Police

- Perceptions of the police tend to form in a u-shape
  - → Develop in early childhood → decline as children enter adolescence → improve again as adolescents reach adulthood
- The development of attitudes to police can be explained through:
  - Legal socialization
    - One's exposure to rules and boundaries through their interactions with formal (e.g., police, teachers) and informal (e.g., parents, peers, family members) agents of social control



# The Current Study

1. What is the relationship between early aggression and perceptions of police legitimacy?
2. How do socialization influences explain this relationship?
3. Are certain socialization influences more important for explaining the relationship between aggression and perceptions of police legitimacy



# Data and Methods

## Age 7

- Early experiences of physical, proactive and reactive aggression (teacher-rated)

## Age 13

- Teacher-child bond
- Parental involvement
- Peer disapproval of aggression

## Age 15

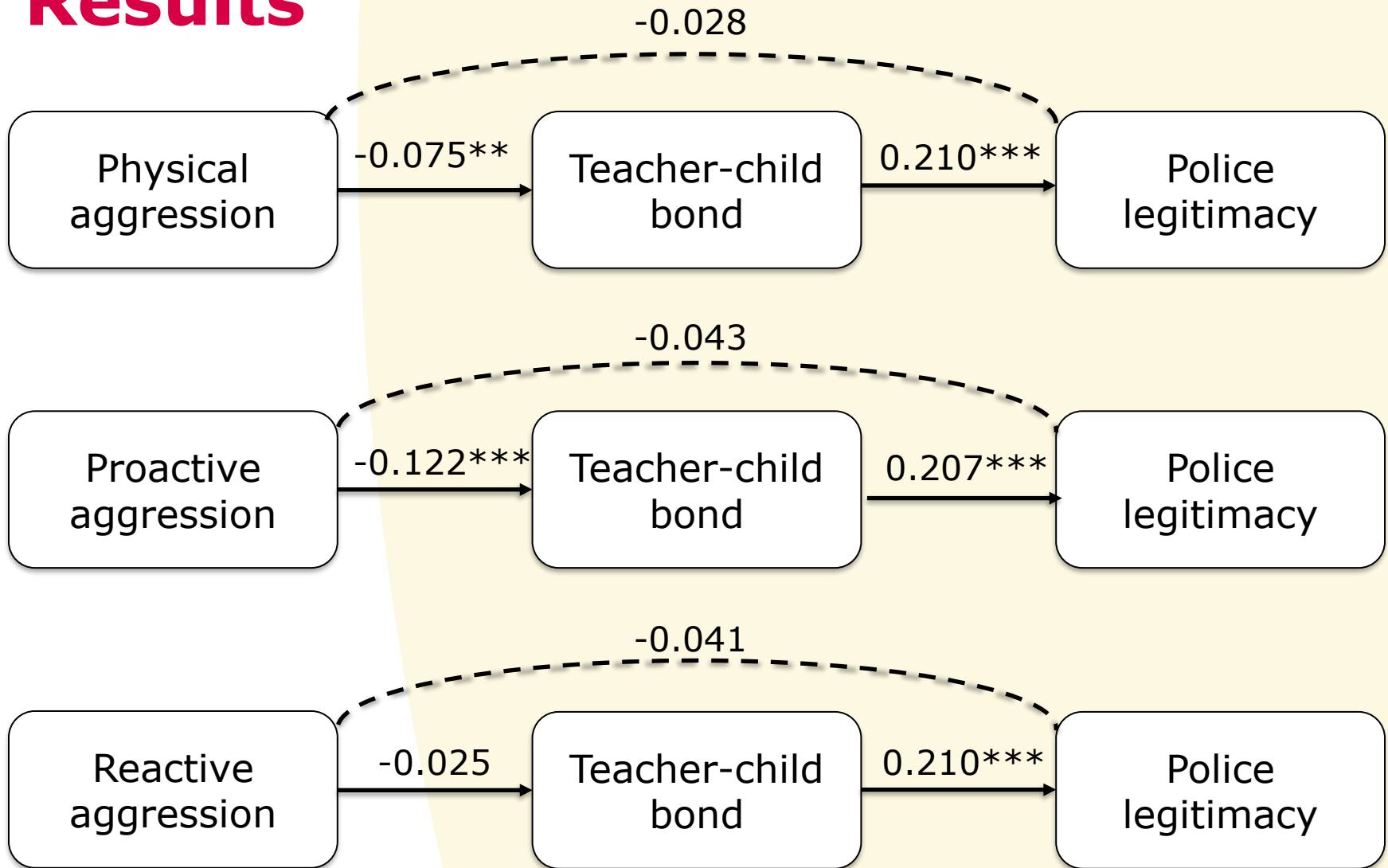
- Police legitimacy

### Controls Included:

- Gender
- Migrant background
- SES
- Police contact



# Results



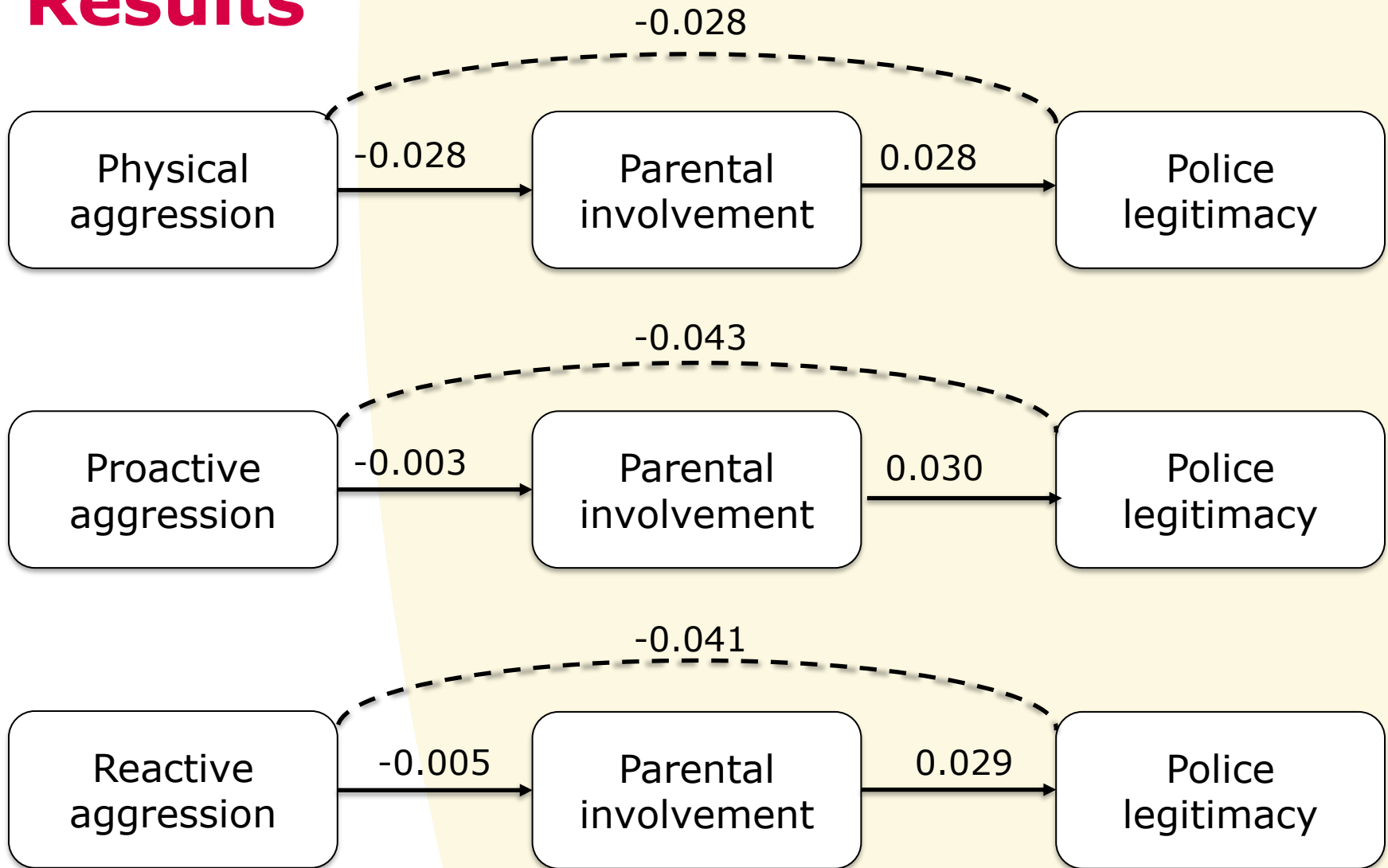


# Results

	Type of aggression		
	Physical aggression	Proactive aggression	Reactive aggression
Indirect effects			
Aggr->teacher-child bond->police legitimacy	-0.016 (0.006)*	-0.025 (0.009)**	-0.005 (0.005)



# Results

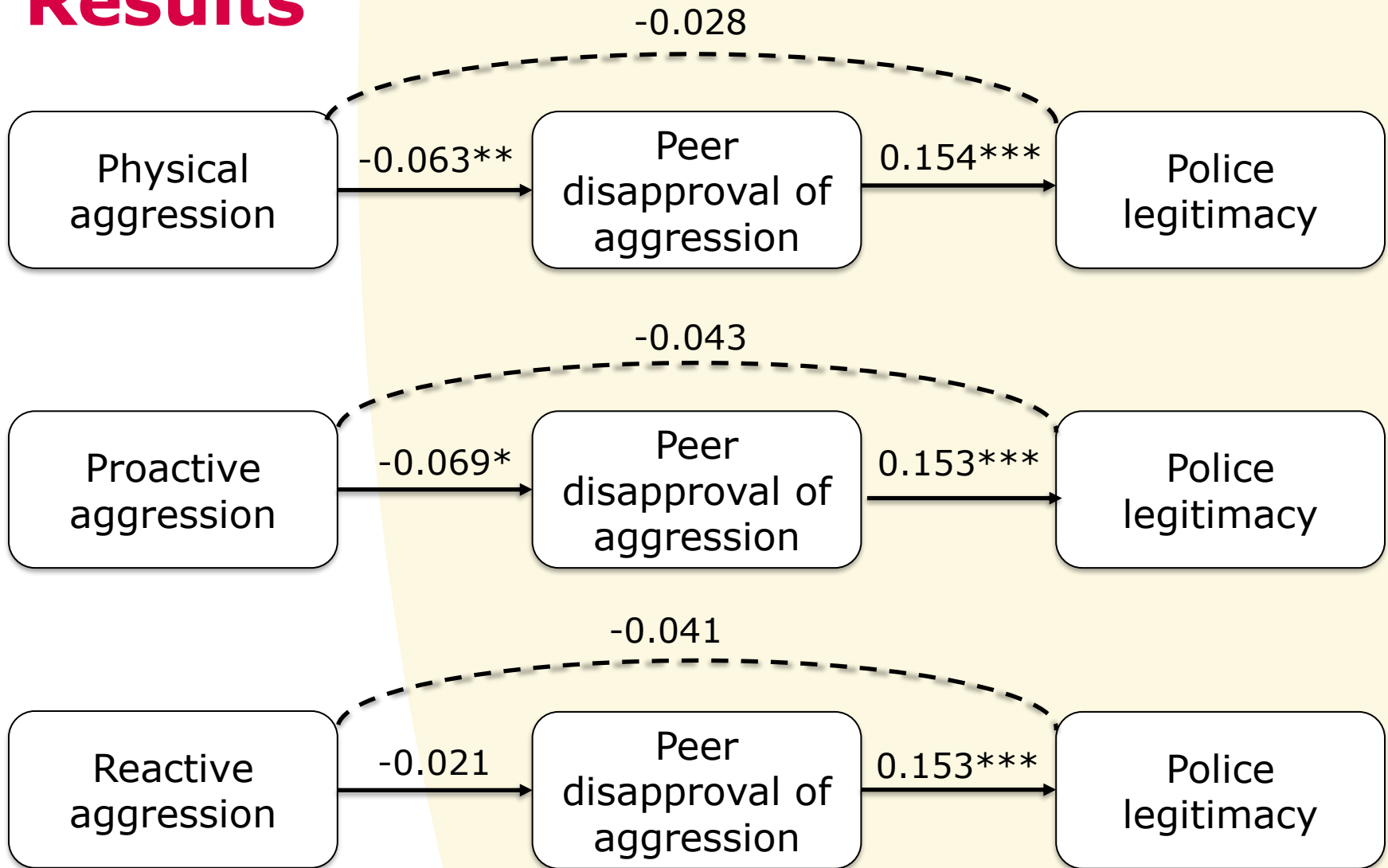


# Results

	Type of aggression		
	Physical aggression	Proactive aggression	Reactive aggression
Indirect effects			
Aggr->parental involvement->police legitimacy	-0.001 (0.002)	0.000 (0.001)	0.000 (0.001)



# Results



# Results

	Type of aggression		
	Physical aggression	Proactive aggression	Reactive aggression
Indirect effects			
Aggr->peer disapproval of aggression->police legitimacy	-0.010 (0.004)*	-0.010 (0.005)*	-0.003 (0.003)



# Concluding Remarks

- Non-legal sources of socialization play a role in shaping perceptions of police legitimacy
  - However, when accounting for **type of aggression** and **socialization agent**, results differ
    - Only seems to matter for physical and proactive aggression and when considering the role of teachers and peers
- Despite the risk factors associated with aggression, contact with socialization agents can shape perceptions of police into adolescence
- When accounting for aggression, results reveal clues around which sources of socialization have an impact, and for whom, in positively shaping perceptions of police

