

# Discrepancies Between Caregiver- and Child-Reports of Peer Victimization and Depressive Symptomatology Among Autistic Adolescents

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## Background

- Peer victimization—the experience of being physically, verbally, or socially harassed—is a risk factor for depression in adolescents.<sup>1,2</sup>
- Relative to their neurotypical peers, autistic adolescents are:
  - At a heightened risk of peer victimization, with prevalence estimates ranging from 46-94%.<sup>3,4</sup>
  - 4-5 times more likely to experience depressive symptomatology,<sup>5</sup> which may be partially mediated by peer victimization.
- Discrepancies in caregiver- vs. self-reports of peer victimization and depression complicate a clear association between antagonistic social interactions and internalizing symptoms in adolescents.<sup>6,7</sup>
- Little is known about how sociodemographics (e.g. gender, race, and income) moderate the relationship between peer victimization and internalizing symptoms in autistic and non-autistic individuals.<sup>5,8</sup>

## Objectives

The present study aimed to explore:

- The extent of the correlation between peer victimization and depression in autistic and non-autistic adolescents.
  - Hypothesis:* Peer victimization will be positively associated with depression in adolescents, irrespective of diagnostic group; this association will be elevated in autistic teens.
- The congruence between caregiver- and self-reported peer victimization and depressive symptomatology in autistic and non-autistic adolescents.
  - Hypothesis:* Self-reports of peer victimization and depression will be higher than caregiver-reports; this difference will be attenuated in autistic teens.
- The moderating effect of sociodemographic factors (i.e., gender, race, and income) on the relationship between peer victimization and depression symptoms in adolescents.
  - Hypothesis:* Female gender, non-white race, and low income will each increase the association between peer victimization and depression in adolescents, irrespective of diagnosis.

## Methods & Approach

As a preliminary sample, **12 autistic** (13-17.6 years,  $M = 14.67$ ; 5 female) and **10 non-autistic** (13.2-17.3 years,  $M = 15.18$ ; 3 female) teens participated in this study.

### Participant Demographics

	Autistic	Non-autistic
<b>N (female)</b>	12 (5)	10 (3)
<b>Age <math>m</math> (<math>sd</math>)</b>	14.67 (1.49)	15.18 (1.84)
<b>Race</b>		
White	7	8
Non-white	4	2
<b>Annual Income</b>		
$\leq \$150,000$	6	7
$> \$150,000$	5	3

*Note.* Given the preliminary nature of this sample, race was stratified into white and non-white (Black, Asian, Mixed, and Hispanic) groups. Annual household income was stratified by median split ( $\$150,000$ ). \* $N_{ASD} = 11$  for race and income; one participant excluded for incomplete SES survey.

### Adolescent Self-Reports:

- Multidimensional Peer Victimization Scale (MPVS)
- Children's Depression Inventory 2 (CDI-2), Child Report

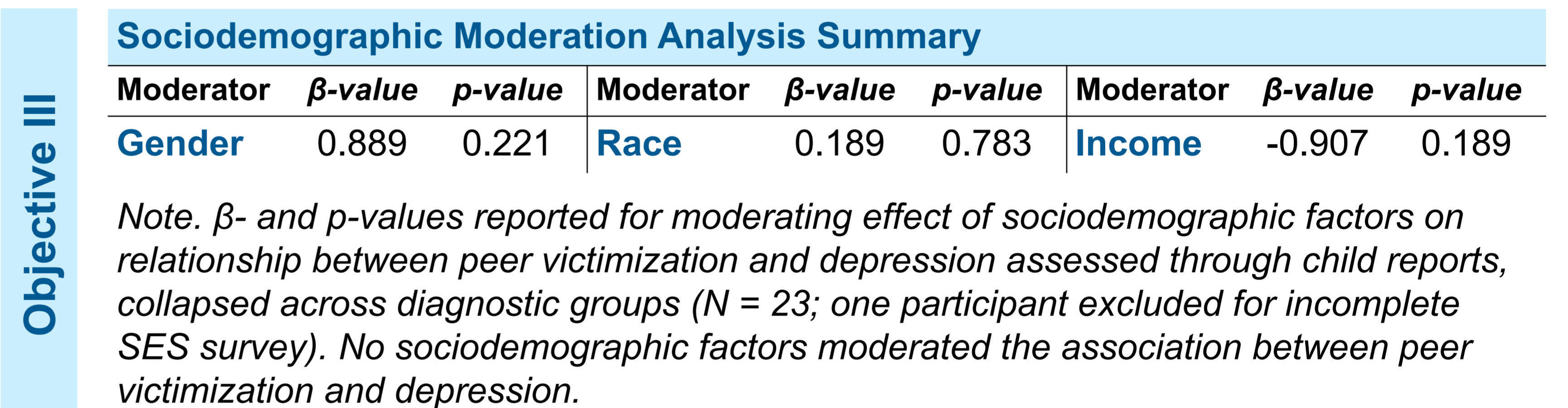
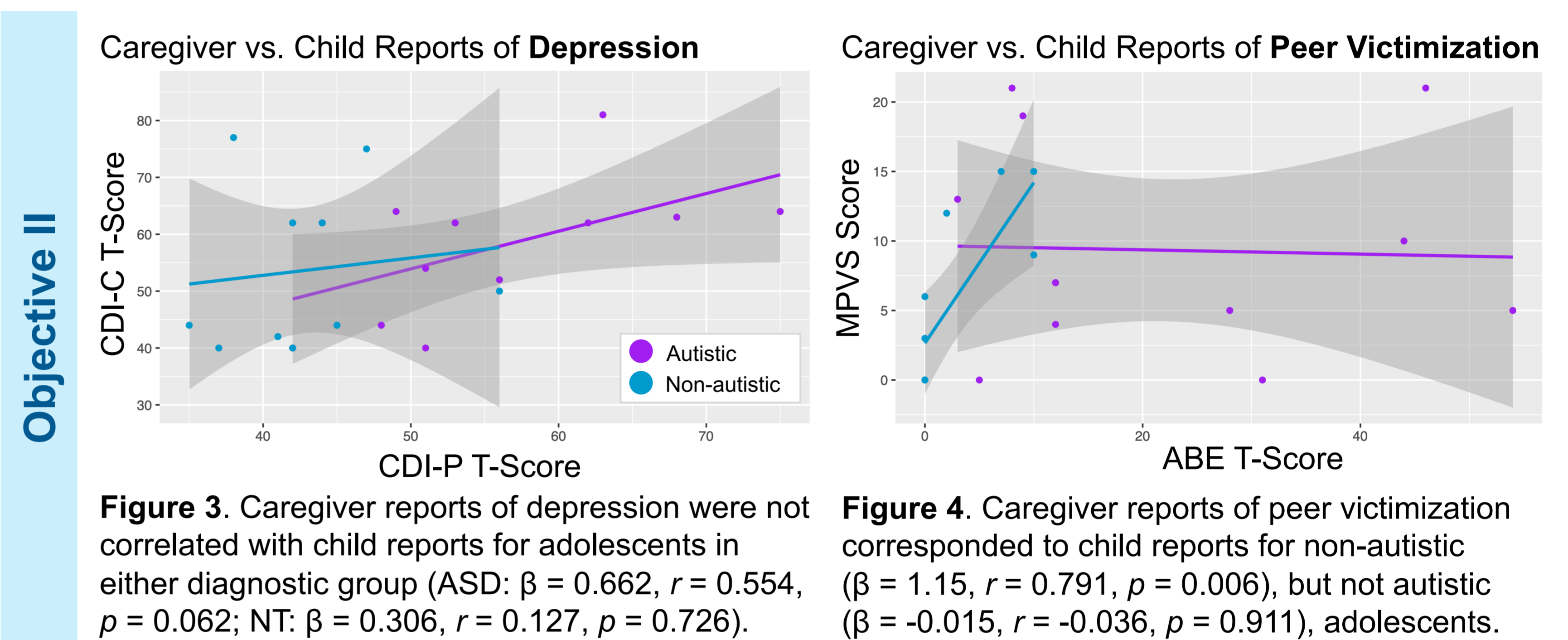
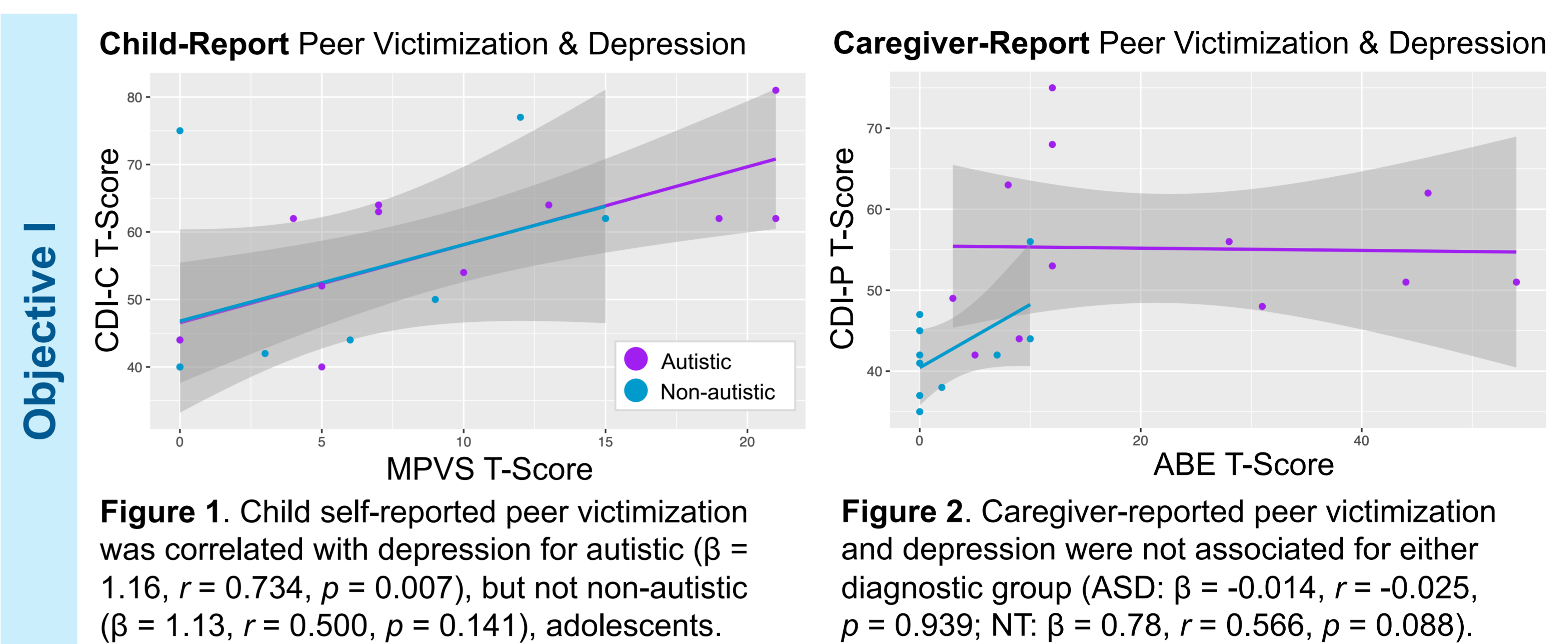
### Caregiver Reports:

- Assessment of Bullying Experiences (ABE)
- Children's Depression Inventory 2 (CDI-2), Parent Report
- Sociodemographic questionnaire

**Autism diagnosis** verified by clinician-administered Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule, Second Edition (ADOS-2).

**Linear regression analyses** were performed to examine correlations between peer victimization and depression across and within child- and caregiver-reports. **Moderation analyses** were performed to explore the influence of gender, race, and income on the relationship between peer victimization and depression within child- and caregiver-reports.

## Results



### Sociodemographic Moderation Analysis Summary

Moderator	$\beta$ -value	$p$ -value	Moderator	$\beta$ -value	$p$ -value	Moderator	$\beta$ -value	$p$ -value
<b>Gender</b>	0.889	0.221	<b>Race</b>	0.189	0.783	<b>Income</b>	-0.907	0.189

*Note.*  $\beta$ - and  $p$ -values reported for moderating effect of sociodemographic factors on relationship between peer victimization and depression assessed through child reports, collapsed across diagnostic groups ( $N = 23$ ; one participant excluded for incomplete SES survey). No sociodemographic factors moderated the association between peer victimization and depression.

## Summary & Conclusions

- This study revealed diagnostic disparities and informant discrepancies across caregiver- vs. child-reports of peer victimization and depression in autistic and non-autistic teens. Namely:
  - Peer victimization was significantly associated with depression in autistic adolescents according to child, but not caregiver, reports.
  - Caregiver and child reports were significantly correlated for peer victimization in non-autistic, but not autistic, adolescents; no association was found for reports of depression.
  - Reports of peer victimization and depression were consistently higher among autistic adolescents, with this pattern particularly evident in caregiver surveys.
- These results suggest:
  - Peer victimization is a risk factor for depression, particularly in autistic adolescents.
  - Caregiver vs. child reporting discrepancies can impede timely and accurate assessment of peer victimization and depression, particularly in autistic adolescents for whom self-reports of such experiences may be discredited by difficulties with abstraction and retrospection.
  - More efficacious tools are needed to identify peer victimization and depressive symptomatology, especially in autistic teens, and elicit early mental health intervention.
  - Although sociodemographic factors (i.e., gender, race, and income) were not found to moderate the relationship between child-reported peer victimization and depression for adolescents in this study, ongoing analyses in a larger sample are necessary to improve statistical power and explore how intersectional factors influence teen mental health.

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