



# Perspectives on Anger Socialization among Adolescent Girls

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## INTRODUCTION

- It is often accepted that negative and “dramatic” emotions are a common part of the adolescent female experience.
- However, the growing area of research on female emotional development and expression has shown that such perceptions may be harmful to young girls.
- By comprehensively examining how these girls’ social contexts and environments may impact their emotional behaviors, self perceptions, and well beings, a deeper understanding of future directions may be gained.

## SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

- Generally, there is a strict construction of “girlhood” that places expectations on young girls such as having a dramatic or emotional side<sup>5</sup>.
- These expectations lead to viewing female anger as typical rather than genuine<sup>5</sup>.
- Cultural influences also present several gendered ideals, especially in children’s media in which female characters are presented as more submissive and positive<sup>3</sup>.
- Such social and cultural influences may have a major impact on adolescent girls’ emotional socialization.

## ANGER COPING BEHAVIOR

- Adolescent girls tend to express negative emotions like anger in avoidant ways, either internalizing anger or externalizing it in an isolated setting<sup>1</sup>.
- Internalization often includes self-silencing feelings of anger in which young girls avoid any emotional expression<sup>1</sup>.
- Self-silencing typically occurs in favor of avoiding conflict in social settings, either in relationships or larger groups, to act in accordance with societal norms<sup>1</sup>.
- Altering emotional expression may even become so engrained that adolescent girls alter their sense of self to match others’ expectations<sup>5</sup>.

## EFFECTS OF ANGER

- Avoidant anger coping has been linked to negative physical and mental health outcomes in several populations and disproportionately in adolescent girls<sup>2</sup>.
- This includes impacts on girls’ physical health, with self-silencing among women being linked to somatic symptoms and even severe conditions like Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)<sup>2</sup>.
- Negative mental health outcomes have also been observed, with depressive symptoms commonly seen in relation to avoidant and internalized anger<sup>6</sup>.
- In addition, some research has even found links between self-silencing, self-esteem, and eating disorders<sup>4</sup>.
- Here, the link between anger socialization and negative health outcomes can be viewed as a positive relationship, with avoidant anger coping learned from social influences creating a build up of stress that is then turned into physical and mental health concerns.

## APPLICATIONS

- This relationship can be seen in data collected from four Michigan school-based health centers that focused on stress, anger, and physical and mental health (Fig. 1).
- Data like this, as well as supportive analyses and theory, reveal the impact of social influences on adolescent girls’ anger socialization.
- Major institutional changes are needed to begin correcting these concerns.

## REFERENCES

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<sup>2</sup>Maji, S., & Dixit, S. (2018). Self-silencing and women’s health: A review. *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*, 65(1), 3-13. doi:10.1177/0020764018814271

<sup>3</sup>Murnen, S. K., Greenfield, C., Younger, A., & Boyd, H. (2015). Boys act and girls appear: A content analysis of gender stereotypes associated with characters in children’s popular culture. *Sex Roles*, 74(1-2), 78-91. doi:10.1007/s11199-015-0558-x

<sup>4</sup>Norwood, S. J. (2009). *Self-silencing and anger regulation as predictors of disordered eating among adolescent females* (Master’s thesis, Carleton University). Library and Archives Canada.

<sup>5</sup>Powell, E., & Williams, A. R. *Negotiating adolescent femininities in school: A feminist critical discourse analysis* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Sheffield.

<sup>6</sup>Tan, J., & Carfagnini, B. (2008). Self-silencing, anger and depressive symptoms in women. *Journal of Prevention & Intervention in the Community*, 35(2), 5-18. doi:10.1300/j005v35n02\_02

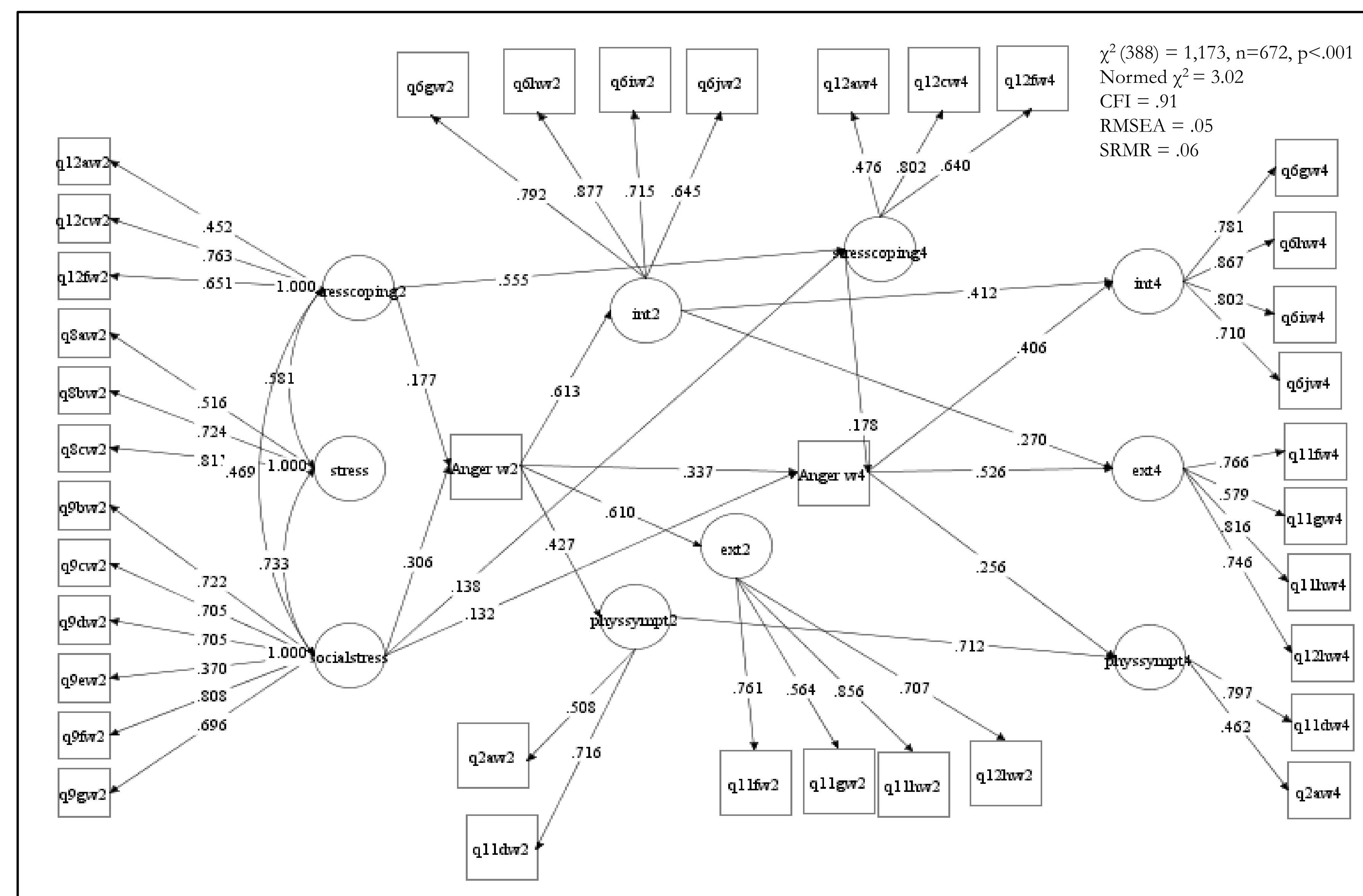


Figure 1. SEM of Stress, Anger, Coping, and Physical Health Over Time