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Abstract for Student Research Conference

Project Title: The Influence of Perceived Popularity on the Emergence of Anxious/Depressed Symptoms in Relationally Aggressive Girls

Children's use of relational aggression is associated with numerous negative outcomes including symptoms of anxiety and depression (e.g., Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Crick, Ostrov, & Werner, 2006). The current project examined the moderating role of popularity (on the association between relational aggression (e.g., spreading hurtful gossip) and anxious/depressed symptoms in a sample of female children and adolescents. Data collected from a sample at a girls' residential summer camp were used to investigate whether popular girls who engage in high levels of relational aggression are less likely than their less popular peers to experience negative psychological outcomes. The relations between the variables of interest were evaluated through a series of hierarchical regression analyses. In particular, the current study assessed whether perceived popularity served as a buffer against anxious/depressed symptoms (concurrent and one-year later) in relationally aggressive girls. Although findings did not support initial hypotheses, results indicated that popularity was a significant predictor of change in anxious depressed symptoms across one year. Specifically, higher levels of perceived popularity were associated with decreases in anxious/depressed symptoms.