

The Predictive Effect of Social Status Goals on Depressive Symptoms

Depression is much more common among women than men (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2001). Many researchers have examined this problem in the context peer processes, but few have looked specifically at the association between social status goals (i.e., the desire to be popular versus well-liked) and depression. While being well-liked is generally associated with adaptive qualities, some studies have found that being popular is associated with relational aggression (i.e., purposefully aggressive acts aimed at harming peer relationships; Cillessen & Rose, 2005; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995), and others have found that relational aggression is associated with depression (Card, Stucky, Sawalani, & Little, 2008), suggesting that high peer status may at times be related to risk for depression. Considering those who wish to be popular may emulate popular peers' behaviors in order to secure that status, the mere goal to be of high social status may be predictive of depression. Thus, this study examined the relationship between social status goals and depression, as well as if gender moderated this relationship. It was expected that the desire to be popular would be associated with depressive symptoms and that the desire to be well-liked would not, and that this association would be moderated by gender, with popularity being a stronger predictor of depression for women. 148 emerging adults ($M_{age} = 19.03$, $SD_{age} = 1.19$; 70% female) completed self-report measures. Results indicated that the desire to be popular was predictive of heightened levels of depression only in females. Unexpectedly, wanting to be well-liked was predictive of depression in males. Findings indicate that gender may play an important role in determining the impact of social goals on depression, suggesting that differential processes pertaining to social status goals are occurring for males and females within peer groups. Implications for interventions will be discussed.