Abstract: Is Young Adolescents' Self-Esteem Predicted By Peer Acceptance? a Gender Perspective (Society for Prevention Research 25th Annual Meeting)

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189 Is Young Adolescents' Self-Esteem Predicted By Peer Acceptance? a Gender Perspective

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Self-esteem influences youth's mental and physical health (Tzesniewski et al., 2006) and is central to adolescent development. During adolescence, youth experience normative drops in self-esteem (Tzerniewsky et al., 2003), putting those with low self-esteem at risk for poor adjustment later on.

Despite the association between peer acceptance and self-esteem (Genoud, 2012) and theoretical expectations linking these two concepts (Leary et al., 1995), studies failed to find time-ordered links between them. Guided by research highlighting gender differences in regards to qualities of peer relationships and antecedents of self-esteem (Rose et al., 2006; von Soest et al., 2015), we hypothesized that this failure to find a significant prediction between peer acceptance and self-esteem may be due to a lack of attention to gender differences and/or to the failure to consider friendship experiences at the same time as peer acceptance (Cannard, 2010). This study examined how adolescents' peer acceptance and how their friends' own acceptance can both predict adolescent self-esteem, differently for boys and girls.

METHOD: 503 students (54% girls, mean age 13) were recruited in the 1st and 2nd years of secondary school in Belgium and were assessed twice, one year apart. A French version of the Rosenberg (1965) scale (Vallières et al., 1990) assessed self-esteem (10 items, a = .81). A peer nomination procedure using the questions "Who do you like the most?" and "Who do you like the least?" assessed students' peer acceptance among their grademates (number of "like most" nominations minus the number of "like least" nominations). Reciprocated "like most" nominations were identified using UCINET 6 (minimum function; Borgatti et al., 2014) and were used as a proxy for identifying participants' friends. Friends' own acceptance was calculated as the mean acceptance score of participants' friends.

RESULTS: Peer acceptance had a marginally positive effect on changes in self-esteem for boys (β = .14, p =.08), but a negative effect for girls (β = -.21, p < .001). However, peer acceptance of adolescents' friends positively predicted self-esteem changes for boys (β = .23, p = .04), but had no effect on girls' self-esteem (β = .017, p = ns).

CONCLUSION: These findings highlight gender differences in regards to the impact of acceptance on self-esteem, which likely account for a lack of significant findings in past studies. Gender differences need to be considered for prevention efforts aiming to increase adolescents' self-esteem. Promoting boys' friendships with well-accepted peers is a promising avenue to enhance their self-esteem. More research is needed to identify the types of peer experiences that can enhance girls' self-esteem.

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