

Negative effects of peer rejection psychology essay



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This paper researches the effects of peer rejection on children, from the beginning of elementary school and transitioning into middle school, and the adverse effects that peer rejection can have. The paper also examines if there are certain factors, such as race, sex, parental care, or societal deviance, that correlate to or can be used as predictors of peer rejection. Looking at peer rejection shows multiple adverse effects, varying from psychological damage, increase in aggression, disinterest in academic life, increase in risk taking behavior, and negative academic performance, with all being related in turn to the duration and intensity of the rejection. This paper examines how peer rejection is correlated to these factors and outcomes, and if they can be used to predict adjustment in adult life.

Peer Rejection:

An Examination of the Negative Effects of Peer Rejection on Multiple Aspects of a Child's Life

Merriam-Webster defines reject as “ to refuse to accept, consider, submit to, take for some purpose, or use,” and peer as “ one that is of equal standing with another : especially : one belonging to the same societal group especially based on age, grade, or status.” From these two definitions we get peer rejection, which can be stated as refusal to accept someone of a similar age, grade or status into a social group. Anyone who has ever been part of a social group in their life, from a school associated club, to a sports team, to a playground group, has dealt with not fitting in. Whether it be due to their race, age, sex, or play preferences, children of all types deal with not being accepted by their classmates. Asking anyone will get you a tale of a time in

which they experienced rejection by friends or fellow students, and how they felt when it occurred. But what many people never think about is how this rejection can affect a child, if it continues for a long amount of time, or is more intense than merely an exclusion from one day's worth of activity. If this occurs there can be a risk for problems to begin developing. First, we will be discussing the immediately recognizable effects of peer rejection on a child, such as disinterest in school work, drop in grade point average, increase in aggression and overall lack of interest in education. Secondly, we will discuss the long term effects of peer rejection, like increase in risk taking behavior, likelihood of continued low scores in GPA and continued lack of interest in school. Lastly, we will discuss how peer rejection can also be a predictor of other negative things in a child's life, such as deviance, whether it be physical, mental, or social, or even maltreatment by their parents.

In 2008, Ladd, Herald-Brown & Reiser conducted a study on whether chronic peer rejection would affect and predict a child's class room participation during grade school. It was hypothesized that "(a) peer rejection creates constraints that inhibit children's classroom participation and (b) the cessation of rejection enables children to become more active and cooperative participants in classroom activities." To test the hypothesis, Ladd et al. (2008) took a sample of 398 children, 199 girls and 199 boys, with a largely Caucasian sample, 77.5%, and followed them from age 5 through age 12. The largely Caucasian sample makes the group seem somewhat biased, due to its lack of representing any other race, however, it can be said that it is representative of the population of the United States. According to the 2011 Census, Caucasians make up 78.1% of the United

States population, so while it may appear biased, it would seem that instead the sampling is quite accurate if we want to apply the sample's results to the population. The results of the study, which are shown through a slope format, found that the early chronic rejected (ECR) group of children, or kids who were rejected from kindergarten to third or fourth grade showed little or no increase in participation of class, as well as this downward or stable trajectory continuing well into the other grades. It also found that children who experienced late chronic rejection (LCR), which was from grades four to six, experienced an immediate decline in participation and a continued decline in what was otherwise a normal upward growth of participation. What this show is that the effects of peer rejection are fast in being detrimental to a child, as well as being able to build up to the point that it lasts for periods of time longer than the original period in which peer rejection was experienced. Of note is that fact that, for the ECR group, once rejection ceased in fourth grade, if peer acceptance begins, then an immediate growth of participation, as would be expected in a non-chronic rejected child, will also begin (Ladd et al., 2008).

Following this connection between peer rejection and decrease in classroom participation, we can look at a study by Véronneau, Vitaro, Brendgen, Dishion & Tremblay, 2010, which attempted to find out whether there was a link between peer rejection and academic achievement from middle age children into teenaged children. They hypothesized that academic achievement would decrease with peer rejection, due to an inability to integrate with the other children. Véronneau et al. used a sample of 198 girls and 254 boys, almost all of European descent, that were selected from

French speaking schools in Quebec. This reveals a bias in the sample, meaning the majority of the children chosen were Caucasians, as well as them being from Canada, which in turn means that the studies results cannot be generalized for all children, which could cause some serious problems if generalized. The lack of knowledge as to whether Hispanics, Asians or African Americans would show similar connections between their academic achievement and peer rejection would be something that a similar study could identify. The study found that academic achievement was a predictor in whether children were accepted by peers or rejected by them. This connection was shown by negative correlations ranging from $-.12$ to a $-.20$, with the scores gradually decreasing towards middle school and adolescence. This not only shows that peer rejection decreases academic achievement, but that it affects it less as children grow older. An explanation could be seen in that as a child grows older, he will not be influenced by teachers and parents negative opinions of children who do badly in school, or that as children reach middle school, student bodies tend to increase in size, meaning they are less likely to know about fellow classmate's academic scores and achievements.

Now to tie those two studies together we can examine a study done Amy Bellmore in 2011, that looked at associations of Grade Point Average (GPA) and peer rejection and unpopularity. The study chose 901 students, 477 boys and 424 girls, from a school system in a middle sized town in the northeastern United States, with an ethnicity similar to that of the united states, with 65% being Caucasian, 20% African American, 12% Latino, and 3% Asian or other, and followed them from grades four to eighth(Bellmore,

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2011). The study found that as peer rejection increased in a semester, GPA would decrease, and that peer rejection in a semester would also predict GPA decrease in the following semester. Bellmore also found that peer rejection and unpopularity function differently from each other, with unpopularity not affecting GPA at all during elementary years, but instead, increasing GPA during middle school! This distinction between actual rejection by peers and a lack of acceptance by peers brings up an interesting thought. While being refused by friends and classmates in elementary school makes a child less likely to participate in class, and less likely to achieve academically, by middle school a general sense of difference and lack of acceptance seems to almost fuel a child's need to prove himself in a purely academic way. While this in no means says that being an outcast from the social norm makes a student better academically, it does seem to validate Véronneau et al.'s (2010) findings that peer acceptance increases with academic achievement. It also seems to suggest that Ladd et al.'s 2008 findings of peer rejection hindering classroom participation could possibly be correlated with a drop in GPA as well. When a child feels like they cannot participate in class, they may learn less due to not asking questions due to fear of classmates reactions, perform less than normal in class projects that require group participation in which they could experience rejection, and overall experience a drop in GPA and academic achievement because of their lack of group work finished and class participation points earned. While the studies seem to have a firm amount of findings from children in elementary and middle school, the lack of research into high school peer rejection and its detriments on academic life, shows that peer rejection still has many opportunities for research.

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This lack of research leads to another study which examined the effects of peer rejection and its influence on girl's risk taking behavior. Conducted in 2004 by Prinstein and La Greca, it aimed to find out if there was a link between peer rejection and aggression and if they could be used as predictors of risk taking behaviors, such as marijuana use and risky sexual behaviors. Prinstein & La Greca took a sample of 148 girls from fourth to sixth grade, and then examined them again when the girls had reached tenth to twelfth grade. The sample's ethnicity consisted of over half being Caucasian, two sixths being Hispanic one sixth being African American and the remainder of the sample being Asian or other. Also of note is the fact that the sample was composed of mainly girls from middle class families. The conclusions drawn from the sample cannot then be applied to general population, and leave open the question of whether socioeconomic status could predispose girls to peer rejection, or if their socioeconomic status itself leaves predisposition to risk taking behavior.

In recent studies, such as that by Shields, Ryan and Cicchetti (2001) and Juvonen (1991), peer rejection was found to be linked to maltreatment by parents and shown to be related to deviance from norms. Beginning with maltreatment by caregivers, Shields et al. 2001 hypothesized that: Maltreated children would evidence maladaptive representations, maladaptive representations would be associated with emotion dysregulation and peer rejection on entry into new social groups, maladaptive representations would foster emotion dysregulation among maltreated children, such that they would be more likely to be rejected by peers. This was done by using a narrative representation by 76 maltreated

and 45 non-maltreated girls and boys at a summer camp, of varying race and ethnicity, from ages eight to twelve, all from an inner city environment. While the sample size isn't large enough to accurately predict for the entire population, it is still diverse enough to give us a clear enough picture of how maltreatment can affect all types of children, and show up in social groups through peer rejection. The determination of maltreatment versus non-maltreatment was found using Child Protective and Preventative Services' records, ensuring that maltreated children came from homes where maltreatment had occurred and would most likely continue due to dysfunctional family, which guards against any bias that could have come from using opinions alone to determine maltreatment. In an effort to keep the samples unbiased, even the types of maltreatment varied from child to child, with sexual abuse, physical abuse and neglect all being types of maltreatment included. After choosing the children, an exercise in which each child was asked to elaborate upon a series of story stems, representing emotional and physical situations involving either a mother or father, was recorded and then transcribed for comparison. After comparing the findings, it was shown that