

Peer Relationships

Importance of Peers

- **Harlows' Studies: Motherlessness versus Peerlessness**
 - Young monkeys reared with live mothers and young peers easily learned to play and socialize with other young monkeys.
 - Babies raised with real mothers but no peers were often fearful or inappropriately aggressive.
 - Those with cloth mothers and young peers were slower, but seemed to catch up socially by about a year.

Importance of Peers

- **Anna Freud and Dann: Peers as primary caregivers**
 - Six infants whose mothers had been deported to Poland and killed by the Nazis
 - Initially raised in a concentration camp together (by prisoners), they were brought to England when their camp was liberated

Importance of Peers

- **Anna Freud and Dann: Peers as primary caregivers**
 - “During the first days after arrival, they destroyed all the toys and damaged much of the furniture. Toward the staff they behaved either with cold indifference or with active hostility.... In anger, they would hit the adults, bite, or spit... They would shout, scream, and use bad language.”

Importance of Peers

- **Anna Freud and Dann: Peers as primary caregivers**
 - “It was evident that they cared greatly for each other and not at all for anybody or anything else. They had no other wish than to be together and became upset when they were separated from each other, even for short moments.... The children’s unusual emotional dependence on each other was borne out further by the almost complete sense of jealousy, rivalry, and competition....”

Born to be a buddy?

- **Gua and Donald**
 - potty trained together
 - fed the same foods
 - had same nap and bath times
 - wore same clothes
 - rough-housed together



Born to be a buddy?

- **Gua**
 - more affectionate and cooperative
 - obeyed spoken commands faster
 - learned to use tools faster
 - faster at simple problem solving



Born to be a buddy?

- **Donald**
 - was the better imitator
 - followed Gua's games
 - picked up Gua's habit of biting the walls
 - at 18 mos., learned many chimp vocalizations (e.g., Gua's food-bark) before he could speak 4 English words
 - "Contrary to general belief, humans imitate apes more than the reverse" (Frans de Waal)



Early play with peers

- **When two unacquainted babies are observed in a laboratory room together**
 - At around 18 months, parallel play
 - By age of 2 years, imitative play (e.g., Follow the Leader)
 - At 2.5 - 3 years, children use words to coordinate play and engage in pretend play (e.g., House)
- **Early play lays the foundation for friendship**

Friendships

- **Friendships are intimate, reciprocated positive relationships between two people.**
- Very young children have preferred playmates before the age of 2
 - 18 m.o. select, touch, and smile more at some peers vs. others
 - When preferred peers show distress, 18 m.o. are much more likely to offer comfort or alert an adult than when a non-preferred peer shows distress

Friendships

- **Preschool Friends**
 - Pretend play occurs more often among friends than nonfriends.
 - Friends have more conflicts than nonfriends
 - Friends deal with conflict differently

TABLE 13.1

Strategies Chosen by Schoolchildren When a Peer Says Something Mean to, or About, Them

Percent of Children Selecting Each Strategy When the Peer Is:

	Their Best Friend	Classmate (Neither a Friend nor Enemy)
Talk to friend/classmate	43%	19%
Think about what to do	24%	14%
Hit, kick, yell	9%	10%
Hold anger in	8%	5%
Quit thinking about it	6%	20%
Get away from what happened	4%	17%
Talk to someone else about it	4%	11%
Do nothing	1%	4%

Adapted from Whitesell & Harter, 1996

Developmental Changes in Friendship

- **Between the ages of 5 and 8 years,**
 - children define friendship primarily on the basis of shared activities.
- **By about the age of 9,**
 - children define friends in terms of taking care of one another, providing assistance, reducing loneliness, and sharing feelings.
- **Between the early school years and adolescence,**
 - children begin to define friendship in terms of mutual liking, closeness, and loyalty.

Developmental Changes in Friendship

- **Researchers do not agree about the nature of the change in friendships during development.**
- **Some say that age-related changes reflect differences in how children think and express their ideas (Selman) rather than differences in the way they view friendship (Hartup & Stevens).**

Factors in Children's Choice of Friends

- **Proximity**: Children are friends with peers who are nearby physically.
- **Age**: Children tend to make friends within their age group.
- **Sex**: Children choose same-sex peers as friends.
- **Race**: Children tend to be friends with peers of the same race, although this tendency varies across cultures and locales.

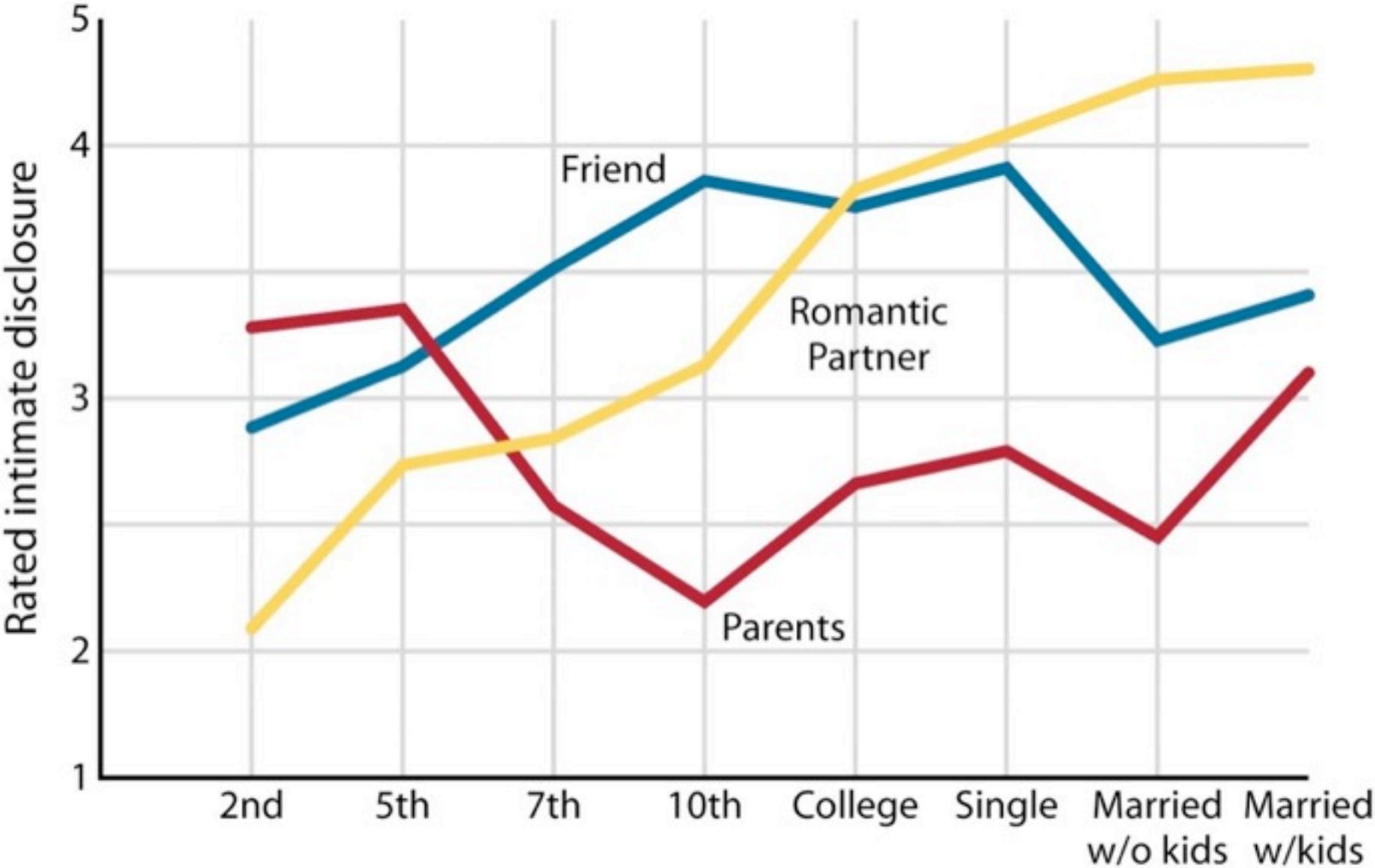
Factors in Children's Choice of Friends

- **From 7 - 14, friends also are similar in**
 - cognitive maturity of play
 - level of aggressive behavior
 - cooperativeness
 - helping behavior
 - antisocial behavior
 - acceptance by peers
 - shyness
 - academic motivation
 - susceptibility to distress and depression

The Functions of Friendship

- **Best friends provide:**
 - A sense of familiarity in new places and situations
 - Protection against victimization
 - Avenues for social and cognitive development
 - Children with friends reason better about other's mental states
 - Friends are most likely to provide constructive criticism
 - Emotional support and security

Self-Disclosure



Sex Differences in Functions of Friendships

- **Girls' friendships are more intimate than boys' and provide more validation, caring, and help.**
- **Boys and girls report similar amounts of fighting and meanness to their friends, but girls resolve their conflicts more easily.**
- **Boys' and girls' friendships are similar in that the friendships involve spending time together, but boys and girls spend time in different activities.**

Functions of Friendships

- **Longitudinal research indicates that having friends leads to positive psychological adjustment over time.**
- **Bagwell, Newcomb, & Bukowski (1998)**
 - Fifth graders w/ best friends
 - **more mature and competent**
 - **more socially prominent**
 - **less aggressive**
 - At 23, same Ss
 - **did better in college**
 - **had fewer problems with the law**
 - **has less psychopathology (e.g., anxiety, depression)**

Importance of Peers

- **Socially withdrawn boys, as adults, are**
 - less likely to begin careers at early ages,
 - have less success in their careers,
 - have less job stability, and
 - less likely to marry and have children
- **Socially withdrawn girls, as adults, are**
 - more likely to marry,
 - have children, and
 - work at home

Effects of Friendship

- **But there is also evidence that friends can have ill effects (Vitaro et al. 1997):**
 - Moderately disruptive children who have highly disruptive peers become highly disruptive themselves
 - Highly disruptive and non-disruptive children do not tend to become either more or less disruptive.
- **Adolescents who abuse alcohol or drugs tend to have friends who do so.**

Friends Come in Groups

- **Young Children's Groups**
 - When very young children interact in small groups, status patterns emerge. Some children are more dominant and central to the activities.
 - By preschool age, there is a clear dominance hierarchy within peer groups.
 - Ethnologists believe that dominance hierarchies serve the purpose of reducing aggression among children.

Cliques

- **“Cliques” are friendship groups that children form, usu. in middle childhood.**
 - They consist of three to nine children, usually of the same sex and race.
 - Cross-clique friendships are relatively rare, but many in a clique are not close friends
 - By age 11, most of children’s spontaneous social interactions occur within the clique.

Cliques

- **Cliques tend to be similar in interests and degree of**
 - academic motivation
 - aggressive behavior
 - shyness
 - attractiveness
 - popularity
- **Clique leaders tend to be popular, athletic, cooperative, studious, and aggressive relative to peers.**

Cliques

- **Age-Related Changes in Cliques**
 - Cliques become a little more stable.
 - In 4th and 5th grade, clique turnover is about 50%
 - In 6th - 10th grade, turnover drops to less than 40%
 - **Cliques become less exclusive**
 - From ages 11 to 18, the number of students who are in only a single clique declines; adolescents have ties to many cliques.
 - **Cliques become less demanding**
 - During early adolescence, the emphasis is on conforming to clique norms.
 - By later adolescence, the importance of belonging to a clique lessens and individual relationships are looked to for fulfillment of social needs.

Cliques

- **Age related changes**
 - Cliques become less sex-segregated
 - During adolescence, girls are more likely than boys to be integrated into cliques.
 - Boys appear to have a greater diversity of friends and are more loosely connected to a single peer group.
 - By the seventh grade, cliques can contain both boys and girls.

Crowds

- **“Crowds” are groups of adolescents who have similar stereotyped reputations.**
- **Among American high school students, typical crowds include, among others:**
 - “Brains”
 - “Jocks”
 - “Loners”
 - “Druggies”
 - “Freaks”

Crowds

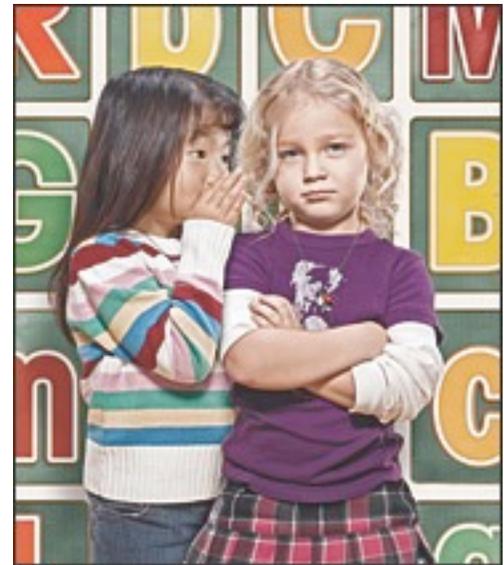
- **Being associated with a crowd may enhance or hurt an adolescent's reputation.**
- **Members of one crowd may be ridiculed or shut out by members of other crowds.**
- **Crowd membership may "channel" an adolescent into taking up the behavior of the crowd, and exert positive influence (good academic performance if a "brain") or negative influence (drug use if a "druggie").**

Negative Influence of Cliques

- **The greatest potential for negative peer-group influence is gang membership.**
 - Gangs are loosely organized groups of adolescents or young adults that engage in illegal activities, such as selling drugs, stealing cars, or fighting.
 - Teens are more likely to be involved in illegal behavior if they belong to gangs.

Status in the Peer Group

- **Sociometric status: The degree to which children are liked or disliked by their peers as a group.**
- **The most commonly used sociometric system classifies children into four groups:**
 1. Popular
 2. Rejected
 3. Neglected
 4. Controversial.



1. Popular Children

- **Popular children are liked by many peers and disliked by few peers.**
 - They are skilled at initiating social interaction with peers and maintaining positive relationships with others.
 - They tend to be cooperative, friendly, sociable, and sensitive to others, and are perceived this way by teachers and parents as well as by other children.
 - They tend to be more assertive than aggressive, getting what they want without fighting with or hurting others.

2. Rejected Children

- **There are two categories of rejected children:**
 - Aggressive-rejected children are prone to hostile and threatening behavior, physical aggression, disruptive behavior, and delinquency. They engage in “relational aggression,” spreading rumors about others, withholding friendship, and ignoring and excluding other children.
 - Withdrawn-rejected children (10% to 20% of those in the rejected category) are socially withdrawn, wary, and timid. However, not all withdrawn children are rejected.

2. Rejected Children

- **Rejected children are more likely than their better-liked peers to be motivated by “getting even” with others or showing them up.**
- **They are more likely to attribute malicious intent to others.**
- **They have more difficulty finding constructive solutions, such as taking turns.**

2. Rejected Children

- **Withdrawn-rejected children have less confidence in their social skills and are more anxious in peer contexts.**
- **Aggressive-rejected children lack social skills and overestimate their social competence.**

3. Neglected Children

- **Some withdrawn children are categorized as “neglected” because they are neither liked nor disliked.**
 - Neglected children tend to be less sociable, less aggressive, and less disruptive than average children.
 - They tend to back away from peer interactions that involve aggression.
 - They tend to be neglected primarily because they are not noticed by their peers.

4. Controversial Children

- **“Controversial” children are those who are liked by some peers and disliked by others.**
 - They have characteristics of both popular and rejected children.
 - They may be aggressive, disruptive, and prone to anger,
 - But also cooperative, social, and good at sports.
 - They may be socially active and good group leaders.
 - They may be viewed by peers as arrogant and snobbish.

Stability of Sociometric Status

- **Over short periods of time (weeks or a few months),**
 - Children who are popular or rejected tend to remain so.
 - Children who are neglected or controversial are more likely to change status.
- **Over longer periods of time, sociometric status is more likely to change.**
 - Stability is higher for rejected children than for popular, neglected, or controversial children.

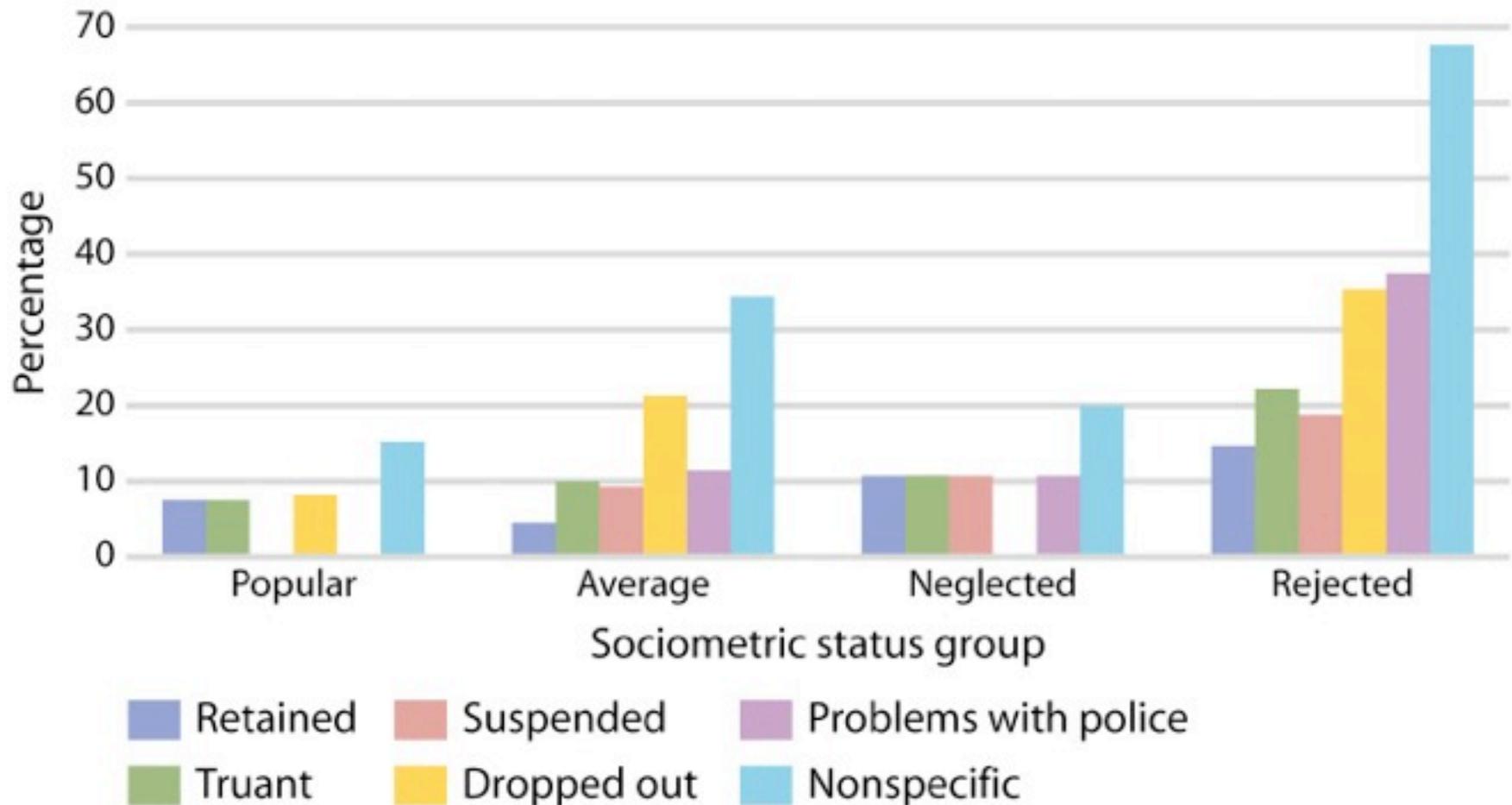
Predictors of Children's Sociometric Status

- **Predictors of popularity change a little with age.**
 - Overt aggression has a less important role in peer rejection in adolescence than in childhood.
 - Withdrawn behavior seems to become a more important predictor of peer rejection with increasing age in childhood.
 - Social isolation may be forced on some children as they progress through school, either through their own disruptive or aggressive behavior or through self-isolation.

Peer Status as a Predictor of Risk: Academic Performance

- **Rejected children (especially if they are aggressive) are more likely than others to have lower grade-point averages and be viewed as poor students.**
 - The tendency of rejected children to do more poorly in school worsens over time.
 - Rejected children are more likely than popular children to be suspended, repeat a grade, or drop out of school.
 - They are more likely to get in trouble with the law.

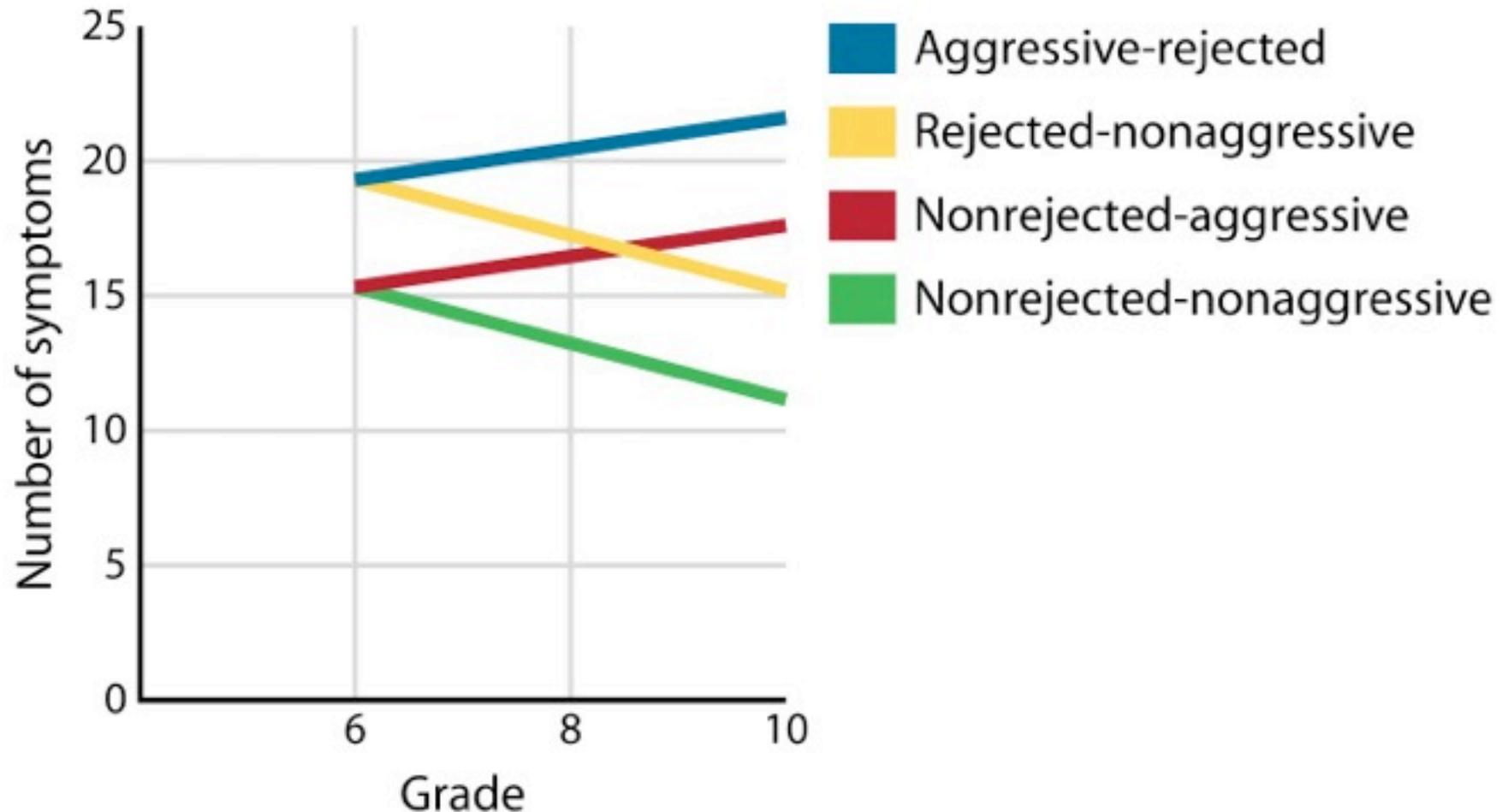
Sociometric Status & Behavioral Problems



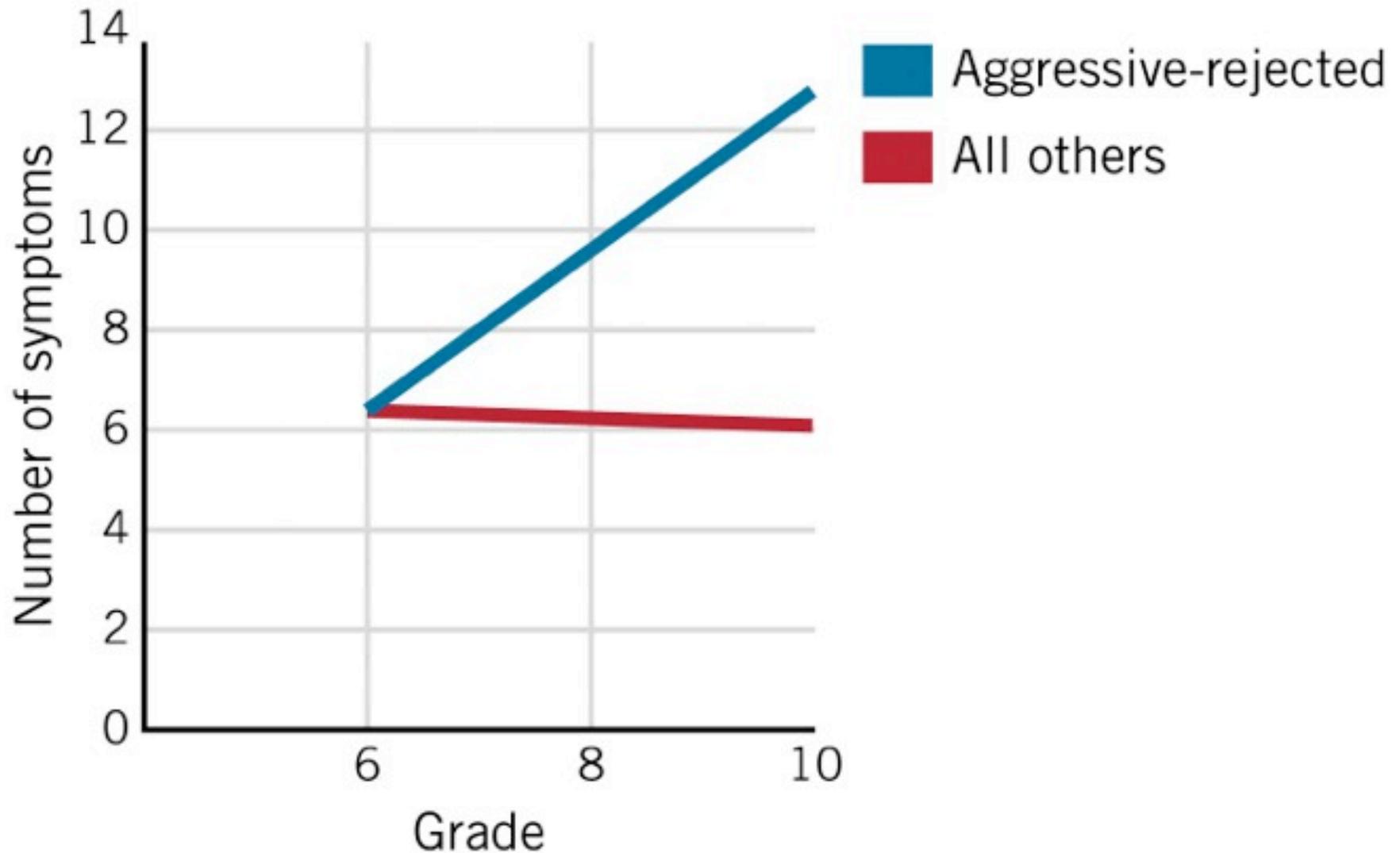
Peer Status as a Predictor of Risk: Adjustment Problems

- **Rejected-aggressive children are more at risk for:**
 - Aggression, delinquency, hyperactivity, ADHD, conduct disorder, and substance abuse (externalizing symptoms)
 - Loneliness, depression, obsessive-compulsive behavior (internalizing symptoms)
- **Non-aggressive-withdrawn children are also at risk for internalizing symptoms.**

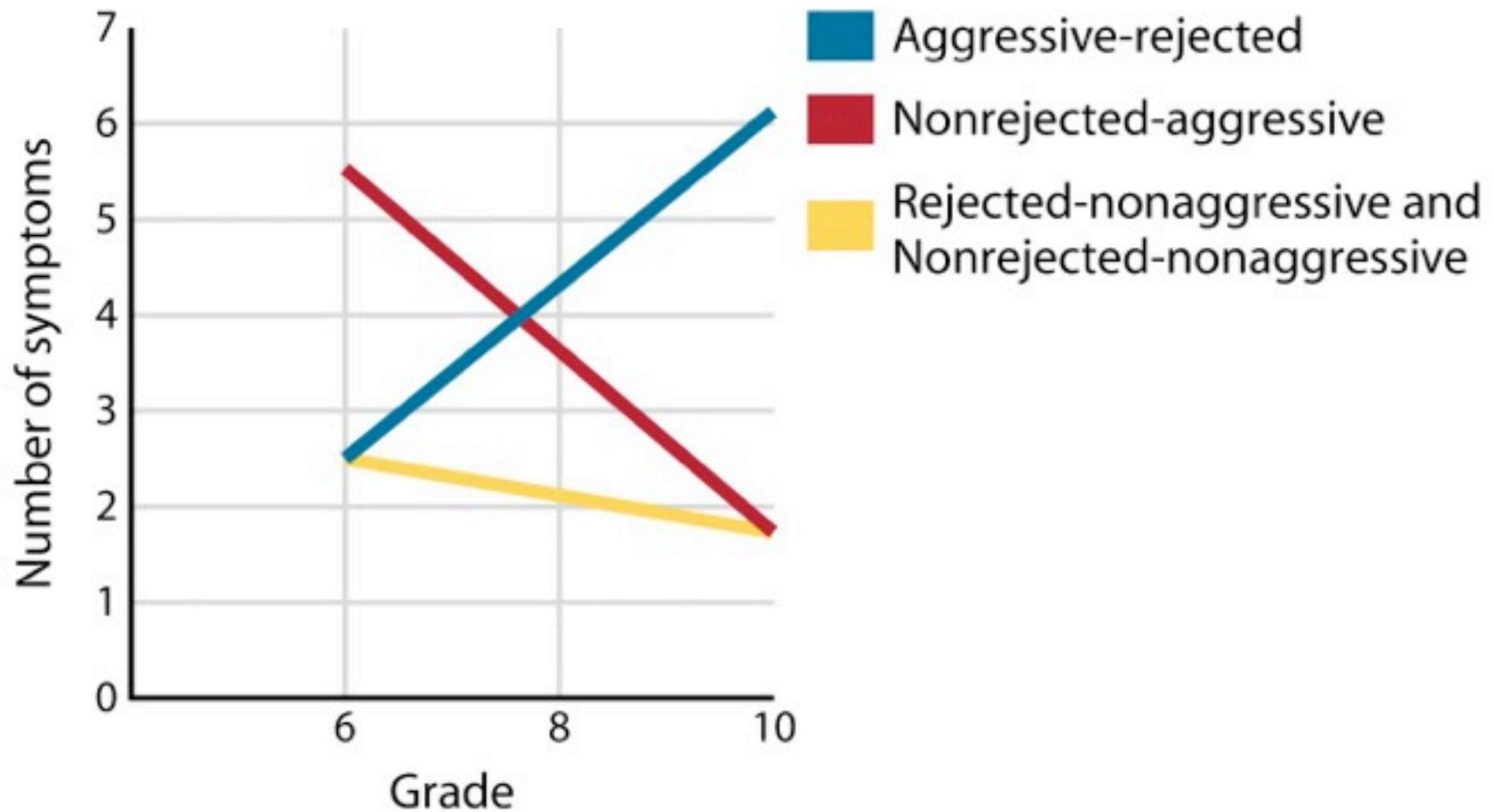
Externalizing Symptoms Reported by Parents: Rejected and Aggressive 3rd Grade Boys



Externalizing Symptoms Reported by Rejected and Aggressive 3rd Grade Boys



Internalizing Symptoms Reported by Rejected and Aggressive 3rd Grade Boys



Role of Parents in Children's Peer Relationships

- **Securely attached children are more competent with their peers.**
 - Children with secure attachment tend to react positively and to be empathic with others. They have good social skills.
 - Children who are not securely attached have trouble with peer relationships.
 - Bidirectionality is a factor. Children's characteristics affect the quality of their attachment, which in turn affects their peer relations.

Parent-Child Interactions and Peer Relationships

- **Parenting practices affect peer relations and vice versa.**
 - Popular children are more likely to have mothers who are warm and authoritative.
 - Unpopular children more often experience harsh, authoritarian discipline.
 - Boys whose fathers play with them are better liked by their peers than are boys whose fathers do not; perhaps this is because such play allows boys to learn to interpret others' emotions and regulate their own play.

Parental Beliefs and Behaviors

- **Parents of socially competent children**
 - **are more involved than other parents in teaching their children social skills and**
 - **provide opportunities for peer interaction.**
 - **tend to believe maladaptive behavior results from specific situations.**
- **Parents of less socially competent children**
 - **believe that the child's nature is determinative and cannot be changed—the child was “born that way.”**
 - **not as likely to help their children solve their**

Gatekeeping, Coaching, and Modeling by Parents

- **Gatekeeping: Parents of socially competent preschoolers provide opportunities for their children to interact with peers.**
- **Coaching: Preschool children tend to be more popular if parents coach them in how to deal with unfamiliar peers.**
- **Parents can model socially competent and incompetent behaviors, indicating how (and how not) to deal with conflicts.**