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***published in***

Social Development  
2006

***DOI (link to publisher)***

[10.1111/j.1467-9507.2006.00349.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9507.2006.00349.x)

***document version***

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication in VU Research Portal](#)

***citation for published version (APA)***

Banerjee, R., Rieffe, C. J., Meerum Terwogt, M., Gerlein, A. M., & Voutsina, M. (2006). Popular and rejected children's reasoning about negative emotions in social situation: The role of gender. *Social Development*, 15(3), 418-433. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9507.2006.00349.x>

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# Popular and Rejected Children's Reasoning Regarding Negative Emotions in Social Situations: The Role of Gender

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## Abstract

*Two studies compared popular and rejected children's reasoning regarding social interactions involving negative emotions. The first study, with 23 rejected and 23 popular 10- to 11-year-olds, involved hypothetical social scenarios where a classmate 'victim' was likely to experience a negative emotion. Although popular and rejected children both recognized negative emotions and were equally likely to suggest helping behaviour to aid the victim, there were gender effects on the type of helping behaviour suggested. Specifically, popular girls were significantly more likely to offer comforting behaviour than advice whereas popular boys offered advice more than comfort; no such preferences were exhibited by the rejected children. Furthermore, popular girls were significantly more likely than other children to refer to emotional states when justifying their helping response. In the second study, 30 popular and 30 rejected eight- to 10-year-olds identified the motives behind story characters' efforts to mask negative emotions. Popular girls were more likely to identify the target motives than rejected girls, but no such difference was apparent for the boys. The results are discussed in the light of evidence regarding gender differences in peer interaction patterns.*

*Keywords:* peer status; helping; emotional displays; gender differences

A large body of research over the last several decades has examined the antecedents, consequences and correlates of peer acceptance in childhood. Sociometric techniques, whereby children are asked to nominate classmates they most and least like to play with (or to give ratings of classmates' likeability), have allowed researchers to classify children into different 'peer status' groups. Most notably, the identification of certain children within a class as popular (liked by many, disliked by few) and certain other children as rejected (liked by few, disliked by many) has led to significant efforts by researchers to specify the socio-behavioural and social-cognitive profile of each peer status group. The present study was designed to investigate one aspect of this profile—

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reasoning regarding negative emotions in the context of peer interaction—with attention to theoretically meaningful relations between peer status and gender.

Newcomb, Bukowski, and Pattee (1993) used meta-analysis to identify behavioural differences between children in different peer status groups, distinguishing children on three broad dimensions—sociability, aggression, and withdrawal. Speaking at this level, popular children are high on sociability and low on aggression and withdrawal whereas rejected children are high on aggression and withdrawal and low on sociability. More recently, Banerjee and Watling (2003) have shown that specific sets of peer-nominated characteristics can be very successful in predicting peer acceptance (e.g., helping other people, playing fairly, waiting for one's turn and having good ideas for things to do). Indeed, there is a general consensus that popular children, but not rejected children, have a socio-behavioural profile that is well adapted to establishing and maintaining positive relationships with peers (see review by Gifford-Smith & Brownell, 2003).

Importantly, because a proximal determinant of how one behaves with others is one's judgements and reasoning regarding the social situation at hand, researchers have also identified social-cognitive correlates of peer acceptance and rejection. Rubin, Bukowski, and Parker's (1998) review of research on peer relations, for example, identifies a wide range of social-cognitive variables (e.g., goals, attribution biases, perspective-taking, response evaluation and selection) that have been associated with peer acceptance in past research. Crick and Dodge's (1994) analysis of evidence in support of their social information-processing model provides a convincing account of how popular and rejected children differ in the representations they make of social situations, the goals they formulate, the responses they access and the responses they select. Furthermore, recent research on children's understanding of mind has provided preliminary evidence of differences between peer status groups (e.g., Peterson & Siegal, 2002; Slaughter, Dennis & Pritchard, 2002; Sutton, Smith & Swettenham, 1999). Indeed, Banerjee and Watling (2005) have shown that rejected children have a poorer insight than popular children into complex socio-emotional dynamics such as those surrounding unintentional insults, or *faux pas*.

The present study is concerned in particular with how children deal with negative emotions in social situations. All children are likely, at least occasionally, to experience negative emotions in themselves and in others, and understanding and managing these emotions must surely be an important part of social life. Harris's (1989) elegant presentation of emotional development considers how children learn to regulate their own negative emotions (i.e., make themselves feel better), modify others' negative emotions (e.g., comfort others) and appreciate how and why negative emotions can be masked in social situations (e.g., not looking disappointed upon receiving a dull present). These skills are likely to be of great significance in social life. Highlighting the skills as a critical element of 'emotional competence', Gordon (1989, p. 324) states, 'This ability to manage distressful emotions permits the child to maintain social poise and direct attention to the tasks at hand'. It follows, then, that those with more developed skills of these kinds should be more successful in social life. Indeed, there is evidence that some general aspects of emotional functioning (e.g., decoding others' emotional expressions, affective perspective-taking) as well as the management of negative emotions in particular (e.g., displaying rule knowledge, regulating anger) are associated with peer liking and/or competent social interaction (Cassidy, Werner, Rourke, Zubernis & Balaraman, 2003; Dearing et al., 2002; Dunn & Cutting, 1999; Garner, 1996; Hubbard & Coie, 1994; Jones, Abbey & Cumberland, 1998).

The research listed above provides a strong indication that the way in which children manage negative emotions is likely to be relevant to their social relations, but considerable work remains to be done to establish how children's reasoning regarding negative emotions differs among peer status groups. Crucially, we need to pay attention to the role of gender in investigating such peer status differences. The argument that there should be gender differences in the association of social-cognitive patterns with peer relations is compelling, although few studies so far have directly examined the way in which gender may moderate associations between social cognition and socio-metric status. Crick and Dodge (1994), pointing to the general tendency for girls to be 'interpersonally oriented' and boys to be 'instrumentally oriented', suggest that most social maladjustment will be related to differences in gender-normative patterns of social information-processing. In their words, 'social maladjustment will be associated with interpersonally related cognitions for girls and instrumentally related cognitions for boys' (p. 92). Following this line of reasoning, we would expect social cognition regarding negative emotions in social situations to be of greater significance for girls' social adjustment than for boys.

Our expectation of different peer status effects for boys and girls is consistent with a large body of evidence concerning girls' and boys' peer interactions. Golombok and Fivush (1994, pp. 128–129) conclude that 'Female friends talk about emotions and disclose more about their own emotional lives than do male friends'. This increased discussion of emotional issues is likely to stem from—and be facilitated by—the closer intimacy of small, dyadic friendship groups among girls than among boys (see Benenson, Apostoleris & Parnass, 1998; Erwin, 1993). Indeed, Salisch (2001) suggests that a deeper understanding of emotion is likely to arise from such close preadolescent friendships: 'Friendship challenges children to acquire the skills necessary for building and maintaining intimacy, such as expressing caring and concern . . . ' (p. 315). Moreover, she points to disagreements and conflicts within close friendships as particularly important for the development of skills for the regulation of emotional experiences and expressions. Given the very well established gender difference in intimacy of peer relationships (e.g., see Furman, 1996), we expect that reasoning regarding negative emotions will be more closely connected to peer status for girls than for boys. We test this expectation with respect to children's helping responses in Study 1, and children's reasoning regarding emotional display regulation in Study 2.

## **Study 1**

Our first study compared popular and rejected children's judgements regarding if and how they would help fictional peer 'victims' who are experiencing stressful circumstances that would be likely to elicit negative emotions such as sadness, fear, or anger. We used a series of hypothetical vignettes based on stories developed by Meerum Terwogt (2002) to assess emotion and gender effects on helping behaviour. In Meerum Terwogt's study, girls were more likely than boys to say that they would offer help to the victim. We built on this finding in the present study in two ways: firstly, we assessed the type of helping behaviour suggested and secondly, we explored their associations with peer status.

As described in more detail below, we first determined that all the children could recognize negative emotions in these scenarios, and then asked the children to indicate what they would do or say to the victims and why. We expected popular girls to suggest comforting strategies designed to modify the emotions, because of a stronger focus on

the victims' negative emotions. In contrast, we expected suggestions of instrumental strategies for remediating the situation to be associated with popular status among the boys.

## Method

### *Participants*

Sociometric interviews were conducted with 108 children aged 10 to 11 years, from sixth grade classes in four urban schools. A sub-group of 23 rejected children (11 girls, 12 boys; mean age 11;1, *SD* 3.06 months) and 23 popular children (12 girls, 11 boys; mean age 11;2, *SD* 3.12 months) was selected for the main study. The children were all native English speakers and were of White, Black and Asian ethnicities. Parental consent was obtained for all participants.

### *Measures*

Two tasks were administered in the present study: a sociometric task and a helping task.<sup>1</sup> In the sociometric task, the children were asked to identify the classmates they most and least liked to play with. Unlimited nominations were allowed. This measure was used to identify popular and rejected children for further work.

In the helping task, children were presented with six short vignettes adapted from Meerum Terwogt (2002). Each vignette was written in the second person and participants were asked to imagine themselves as the protagonist in the situation. In each story, the protagonist met a victim in sad, frightening, or anger-eliciting circumstances. The victim always matched the gender of the participant. The victim's emotion was not explicitly stated and participants were always first asked how they thought that the victim would feel in order to determine that a negative emotion had been identified. The participants were then asked what they would do or say to the victim, and why. Appendix A provides a sample story and responses of each type.

### *Scoring*

For the sociometric measure, the numbers of positive ('like most', LM) and negative ('like least', LL) nominations received by each child were standardized within gender and classroom. For each child, subtracting the standardized LL score from the standardized LM score yielded the social preference score. This in turn was standardized within gender and classroom. Popular children had a standardized social preference score greater than 1, with a standardized LM score greater than 0 and a standardized LL score less than 0 whereas rejected children had a standardized social preference score less than -1, with a standardized LM score below 0 and a standardized LL score above 0. This scoring is in accordance with the standard practice specified in Coie and Dodge (1983) and Coie, Dodge, and Coppotelli (1982).<sup>2</sup>

For the helping stories, responses to the first question ('How does your classmate feel?') were scored for whether they referred to an appropriate negative emotion (e.g., sadness, anger, fear). Responses to the second question ('What would you do or say to your classmate?') were scored for whether they involved helping the victim or not, and helping responses were again divided into comforting (offering relief to the victim's distress) or advising (providing suggestions for action). Note that these categories are

not mutually exclusive because the children's responses could contain both elements and therefore be assigned to both categories. The children's justifications for their responses were scored for whether any reference was made to the victim's emotional state(s) or not. It should be noted that for all questions, where a child's answer contained two different responses of the same type (e.g., two different negative emotions, two different comforting strategies, etc.), this did not contribute more than one point to the relevant score. Thus, children received scores from 0 to 6 for the numbers of stories where a negative emotion was identified, where a helping strategy was mentioned, where a comforting strategy was mentioned, where an advising strategy was mentioned and where the justification referred to the victim's emotional state. Two raters scored children's answers. The inter-rater agreement across all questions was 95 per cent (average  $\kappa$  across questions = .89), and discrepancies were resolved by discussion.

### *Procedure*

For the first part of the study, the participants completed the sociometric measure in a group administration format. In collaboration with the class teacher, the researcher read the instructions aloud to all the participants, informed them of the strict confidentiality of their answers and asked them not to discuss the answers with their peers. Children read along silently and responded in writing to the peer nomination questions.

Approximately one week after the initial assessment, the sub-group of 46 children identified as rejected and popular completed the helping task in an individual session in a quiet room in the school. The researcher introduced the task and assured the children that there were no right or wrong answers. Instructions for the task were presented as follows:

I want you to imagine that you are one of the main characters. You have probably never experienced a situation like this in exactly the same way, but I would like you to imagine yourself as taking part in the situation as best as you can. Please listen carefully, because I will ask you three questions after each story about how the other person feels and what you would do or say. Okay? Well then, here is the first one.

The researcher read the six vignettes in random order, and the children responded to the three test questions after hearing each vignette. This assessment took approximately 10 minutes. With the children's consent, all interviews were tape-recorded. The design and procedure were approved by the relevant academic Ethics Committee.

### *Results*

All 46 children identified appropriate negative emotions in the victim for all six vignettes, and no child ever identified a positive emotion. Thus, both popular and rejected children were able to acknowledge negative emotions in other children experiencing stressful events and the vignettes appeared useful for the purpose of this study.

We then counted how often children offered helping behaviour to the victim across the six stories. An analysis of variance on these scores, with 'gender' and 'peer status' between subjects, showed only a main effect of gender,  $F(1,42) = 4.18$ ,  $p < .05$ : The girls in general offered help on more stories than did the boys; means (*SDs*) are 5.91 (.29) and 5.52 (.85), respectively. There were no main or interaction effects of peer status,  $F_s < 1$ .

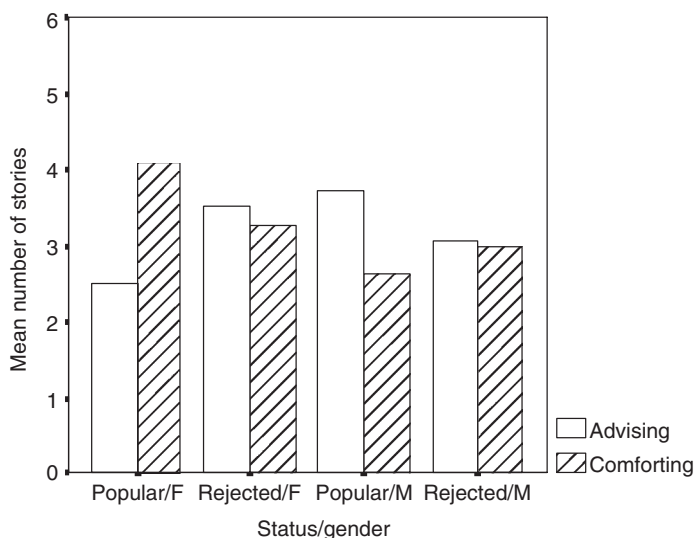


Figure 1. Mean Number of Stories where Comforting and Advising Strategies were Suggested by Peer Status and Gender (Study 1).

Our examination of the types of helping strategies (comforting vs advising), however, showed significant peer status effects. As illustrated in Figure 1, our planned comparisons of the numbers of comforting and advising strategies suggested by each group of children showed that popular girls were significantly more likely to suggest comforting than advising strategies,  $F(1,11) = 17.49$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .50$ , whereas popular boys showed a significant preference for advising over comforting strategies,  $F(1,10) = 6.26$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .24$ .<sup>3</sup> Rejected boys and girls showed no preference for either advising or comforting strategies,  $F_s < 1$ .

Finally, we examined the extent to which children referred to the emotional states of the victim when asked to explain their reactions. Using the number of stories (out of six) where such reference was made in the children's justifications as the dependent variable, our planned comparisons of popular versus rejected girls and popular versus rejected boys showed that the popular girls made significantly more reference to the victim's emotional state than the rejected girls,  $F(1,21) = 17.32$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .45$ , whereas there was no such difference between status groups for the boys,  $F < 1$ . This pattern is illustrated in Figure 2.

### Discussion

Both popular and rejected boys and girls were able to predict negative emotions for the victims in the hypothetical scenarios and—consistent with Meerum Terwogt (2002)—the majority of responses to these victims involved helping strategies. However, more detailed analysis of the responses showed effects of peer status and gender. Firstly, just like the children in Meerum Terwogt's (2002) study, girls were more likely to offer help than boys. Secondly, in line with the argument presented earlier, popular girls were significantly more likely to suggest comforting strategies to relieve the victim's negative emotions than to suggest advising strategies. In contrast, popular boys preferred to



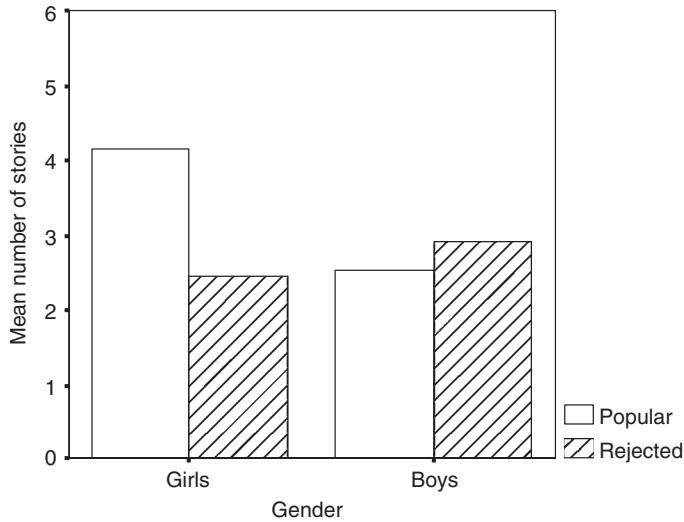


Figure 2. Mean Number of Stories where Children Referred to the Victim's Emotional State by Peer Status and Gender (Study 1).

suggest advising strategies that are focused on action to remediate the stressful situation. Finally, whereas popular girls referred far more to the victim's emotional state than the rejected girls, no such difference was evident between popular and rejected boys. These effects are even more striking given that all children had initially demonstrated that they were aware of the negative emotions of the victims.

These results shed new light on gender effects in peer relations and highlight the value of investigating children's reasoning regarding everyday social contexts that involve negative emotions. Consistent with other findings of gender differences in empathic responding (e.g., Bryant, 1982; Cohen & Strayer, 1996; Feshbach, 1982; Hoffman, 1977; Meerum Terwogt, 2002), the girls in general offered more help to victims than the boys. Of course, in the present study, where the participant's gender matched the victim's gender, this could be interpreted as an effect of either the participants' gender or the fictional victim's gender. However, the relations between peer status and gender regarding the type of helping strategy offered and the extent to which the victim's emotional state is addressed suggest strongly that the gender effects are not mere artifacts of the story context.

In particular, our results fall in line with a large body of work indicating that girls' friendships are often more focused on emotional content than those of boys: for instance, Parker and Asher (1993, p. 617) found that boys reported 'less intimate exchange . . . less validation and caring, and less help and guidance in their friendships than did girls' and Furman (1996, p. 60) speaks of the gender difference in self-disclosure as 'one of the most consistent findings in the literature'. In the present study, the popular girls were especially likely to address and affectively respond to the negative emotions, both in terms of the higher number of comforting (as opposed to advising) strategies suggested and in terms of the more frequent references to the victim's emotional state. In contrast, the popular boys were more likely to offer instrumental help—advice regarding actions that would tackle the stressful circumstances. These patterns build on Hoffman's (1977) views regarding empathy in boys



and girls: although both sexes are regarded as equally adept in perceiving the negative emotions of others, boys adopt an action-oriented plan whereas girls are likely to develop a vicarious affective response. Our results demonstrate that the presence of this gender difference is related to peer status: it was only the popular children who preferentially generated the gender-normative helping responses.

## Study 2

The results from Study 1 indicate that peer acceptance in girls, but not in boys, is associated with the tendency to suggest strategies for relieving the negative emotions of peers in hypothetical scenarios. However, it is unclear whether this pattern is specific to helping behaviour (i.e., how to make someone feel better), or reflects more general differences in reasoning regarding negative emotion in social situations. Therefore, in our second study, we broadened our focus by examining the children's understanding of emotional displays designed to mask negative emotions. If it is true that peer acceptance in girls is linked to a greater understanding of social situations involving negative emotions in general—as opposed to greater knowledge simply as to how to cheer others up—then we should find similar relations between peer status and gender in the understanding of motives underlying the emotional displays that mask negative emotions.

In the study below, we provided the children with hypothetical scenarios based on Banerjee's (2002) stories, where characters mask negative emotions for three reasons: to protect or improve their self-image, to obtain a desirable (or avoid an undesirable) situational outcome for the self and to obtain a desirable situational outcome for the audience. For each story, the child's task is simply to identify the target motives for the character's display. We expected popular girls to score significantly higher than rejected girls, but anticipated that such a peer status effect would be less or not at all evident among the boys.

Because children's identification of some target motives may approach ceiling level at the end of primary school (Banerjee, 2002), we used slightly younger children in this study than in our first study. In addition, we administered the British picture vocabulary scale (BPVS) (Dunn, Dunn, Whetton & Pintillie, 1982) to rule out differences in verbal ability as an explanation of observed gender and peer status effects.

## Method

*Participants.* Sociometric interviews were conducted with 147 children aged eight to 10 years of age, from fourth and fifth grade classrooms in two urban schools. On the basis of these interviews, 30 popular children (11 girls, 19 boys; mean age 9;6, *SD* 6.45 months) and 30 rejected children (14 girls, 16 boys; mean age 9;6, *SD* 6.75 months) were selected. The children were native English speakers and were of White, Black and Asian ethnicities. Parental consent was obtained for all participants.

*Measures.* Three tasks were used in this study: a sociometric task, the BPVS (Dunn et al., 1982), and an emotional display task.<sup>1</sup> The BPVS is a widely used instrument that provides an index of receptive verbal ability and the sociometric task was the same as in Study 1. The emotional display task consisted of nine different hypothetical stories (with accompanying cartoon-style illustrations) involving deceptive emotional displays where the protagonist hides his or her true negative feelings. Three of the

stories involved a self-image motive (concern regarding the impression made on the audience—e.g., not looking stupid), three stories involved a self-outcome motive (concern regarding achieving a particular situational outcome for the self—e.g., getting a ticket), and three stories involved an other-outcome motive (concern regarding achieving a particular outcome for the audience—e.g., not upsetting them). Following each story, the test question required respondents to identify the motive behind each display. In the event of any ambiguous answers, an additional probe (e.g., ‘How would that happen/make them like him?’) could be given. Appendix B provides sample stories and responses for each motive type, as well as brief indications of the content of the remaining stories.

*Scoring.* The sociometric measure was scored as described in Study 1 above. The BPVS was scored in accordance with the standard practice. For the emotional display task, the children scored one point for each story where the target motive was correctly identified based on the criteria given by Banerjee (2002). The children could refer to multiple motives in the response to a given story, but a point was scored only if the target motive was among those mentioned. It should be noted that reference to more than one example of the target motive (e.g., two different self-image concerns) did not contribute more than one point to the score. Thus, children received a score from 0 to 3 for each type of motive. Two raters scored the children’s responses and inter-rater agreement was 92 per cent ( $\kappa = .86$ ), with discrepancies resolved by discussion.

*Procedure.* All testing was conducted by a female researcher who took the children from their classroom into a separate, quiet room. Firstly, all children received questionnaires including sociometric nominations. The completion of the questionnaires took 15 minutes. Secondly, the selected sub-groups of popular and rejected children participated in further individual interviews with the same researcher approximately one week later. At the beginning of each interview, the children were told that their responses would be treated strictly confidentially. During this session, the children completed the BPVS and the emotional display task. The duration of each interview was approximately 40 mins. All interviews were tape-recorded with the child’s consent. Individual transcripts were made of children’s responses in order to code their answers. The design and procedure were approved by the relevant academic Ethics Committee.

## Results

*Verbal Ability.* Children’s responses to the BPVS were first checked to see if there were any differences in popular and rejected children’s receptive language abilities. The popular children’s average score was slightly higher than that of the rejected children, means (*SDs*), 88.67 (7.41) vs 87.07 (7.12), respectively. However, a 2 (status: popular vs rejected)  $\times$  2 (gender)  $\times$  2 (grade: fourth and fifth) analysis of variance showed only an expected main effect for grade,  $F(1,52) = 8.04$ ,  $p < .01$ .

*Emotional Display Scores.* Children could score a maximum of three points for each of the three motive types, or nine points in total. Preliminary analysis showed no effects of grade or motive, so these variables were excluded from further analysis. As predicted, our planned comparison of popular and rejected children on the total score was significant for the girls but not for the boys. Specifically, as illustrated in Figure 3, an

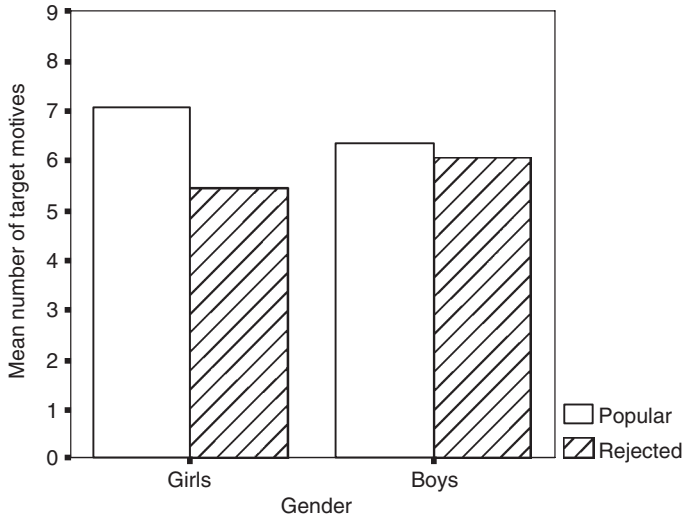


Figure 3. Mean Number of Target Motives Correctly Identified by Peer Status and Gender (Study 2).

ANCOVA on the overall total score with status between subjects and BPVS scores as a covariate showed a significant effect of status when performed for the girls,  $F(1,22) = 6.33$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .22$ , but no such effect when performed for the boys,  $F < 1$ .

### Discussion

The results of this study indicate that, consistent with the findings of Study 1, popularity in girls is associated with a greater insight into social processes involving negative emotion. The finding of this peer status effect only among the girls is compatible with previous findings of gender differences in the development of emotional display rules. For example, both Cole (1986) and Saarni (1984) found that girls were more likely than boys to hide their negative emotions after receiving a disappointing present. This pattern may be linked to gender-related socialization patterns whereby girls are socialized to be more responsive to emotional dynamics in social interaction (e.g., see Zahn-Waxler, Cole & Barrett, 1991).

This study indicates, however, that we should not focus simply on gender differences in the use or understanding of emotional displays *per se*, but also consider the significance of these skills for social relationships. Our results closely relate to Custrini and Feldman's (1989) finding that social competence is associated with accuracy in encoding and decoding others' emotions in girls but not in boys. As we have noted above, emotional issues—and perhaps especially negative emotions—are likely to figure much more in the discussions of girls than of boys. Broader and deeper insights into all aspects of negative emotions (and management thereof) may therefore be more pertinent to the social success of girls than of boys. In line with this, our planned comparisons of peer status groups for each sex separately showed that the difference between popular and rejected children was significant only among the girls. Thus, these results provide further support for the peer status effects observed among the girls in Study 1, and indicate that

the results from that study may indeed have reflected a more general gender difference in the social importance of reasoning regarding negative emotion, rather than a narrow difference in judgements regarding comforting others who need help.

Although no significant effects of the motive variable were observed here, we should not yet rule out the possibility that peer status effects may depend on the particular emotions, motives and contexts involved. For example, Meerum Terwogt and Olthof (1989) observed that boys were especially likely to talk of concealing fear to avoid being seen as a coward (self-image motives). Importantly, even these very specific interactions may be dependent on particular group norms within the child's social circle, and the identity of the audience (e.g., male vs female, peer vs adult) is likely to be particularly relevant to the choice of emotion display (see Zeman & Garber, 1996). Clearly, talking of 'emotional competence' as one monolithic, unitary construct is limiting: children's interpersonal relationships involve a variety of emotional processes (e.g., expressing, decoding, regulating and modifying different feelings) that act on a variety of positive and negative emotions, in a variety of social contexts, for a variety of different reasons. Further research may clarify the social origins of differences in how popular and rejected boys and girls make sense of strategies for modifying and masking negative emotions.

## **General Discussion**

The results from the two studies taken together suggest that associations between peer status and social-cognitive patterns may indeed be moderated by gender. Consistent with Crick and Dodge's (1994) argument, reasoning regarding negative emotions in social situations—an interpersonally oriented aspect of social cognition—was associated with peer acceptance more for girls than for boys. To reiterate, popular girls in Study 1 preferred comforting over advising when suggesting helping strategies, and were more likely than rejected girls to refer to negative emotions when justifying their helping strategies and popular girls in Study 2 were better able to identify various motives for masking negative emotions than rejected girls.

Our findings build on an existing body of evidence linking emotion understanding with social competence and/or peer liking (e.g., Cassidy et al., 2003; Hubbard & Coie, 1994), but also support the notion that attention to negative emotions—and knowledge of the strategies for modifying and masking these—may be more connected to the peer interactions of girls than of boys. This is consistent with the regularly observed finding that girls' smaller, more intimate friendship networks involve more self-disclosure and discussion of personal, emotional experiences (e.g., Benenson et al., 1998; Parker & Asher, 1993).

The research reported here suggests a number of directions for further research, relating to central themes in social-cognitive development. Firstly, the designs of the two studies do not permit conclusions regarding the direction of causality. As noted earlier, von Salisch (2001) emphasized the friendship context as of particular value in stimulating the acquisition of skills for maintaining intimacy and managing emotions, but of course, those girls who possess such skills must surely be more successful in making and keeping friends. Secondly, it is unclear whether the observed differences between popular and rejected children reflect qualitative differences in reasoning or simply a developmental lag between the two groups. Inclusion of an average peer status group would help to determine whether each of the two extreme sociometric groups differs significantly from average children and developmental comparisons would help

to clarify whether the rejected children do eventually develop the gender-normative patterns of reasoning or remain different from their popular counterparts as a consequence of their social exclusion.

A further question that deserves particular attention is whether popular children are simply displaying gender-normative patterns of responses, or strategically adapting their responses to suit the story characters' gender. Further work using mixed-gender sets of story characters could help us determine whether the major achievement of the popular children is in fact their ability to respond in gender-appropriate ways to boys and girls (i.e., instrumental action towards boys, affective intimacy towards girls).

In investigating the origins of any peer status effects, it may be important to examine the development of links between social cognition and peer relations at the level of the group rather than the individual. Maccoby's (1990) influential perspective on gender differences suggests that many of these emerge from distinctive same-sex group interaction styles following sex segregation in childhood. Therefore, further research may usefully track the development of distinctive patterns of reasoning regarding socio-emotional dynamics in the context of the many differences observed in, for example, the playground interactions of boys and girls (e.g., Blatchford, Baines & Pellegrini, 2003). Such work would nicely complement continued efforts to specify socialization influences in family, community, and cultural contexts (e.g., Dunn & Brown, 1994; Gordon, 1989; Malatesta & Haviland, 1982).

Finally, this kind of differentiated approach to the social-cognitive correlates of peer acceptance may play a valuable role in the design and implementation of intervention strategies to promote social and emotional learning and to manage and support children at risk of peer difficulties (see Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group, US, 1999a, 1999b; Greenberg, et al., 2003). The identification of the particular social-cognitive patterns that relate to successful peer relationships among boys and girls is therefore likely to be of great practical, as well as theoretical, significance.

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## Acknowledgements

We would like to extend our thanks and appreciation to the children and staff at the schools that participated in these studies. We are grateful for the helpful comments of three anonymous reviewers on an earlier version of this paper.

## Notes

1. In both studies, children completed additional tests used in other research investigations. The tests were completed in the same order for each child.

2. As an illustration of the difference in absolute numbers of nominations received by the two peer status groups using this sociometric scoring method, Banerjee and Watling's (2003) analysis across 12 classrooms reported an average of 6.30 positive and 0.58 negative nominations for the popular children and 0.81 positive and 9.00 negative nominations for the rejected children.

3. Dunlap, Cortina, Vaslow, and Burke (1996) raise concerns indicating that effect sizes based on the *F* ratio for within-subjects effects with one degree of freedom will be overestimates because of the correlation between the two sets of scores. Thus, the effect size estimates presented for these comparisons were calculated using the equation suggested in Dunlap et al.'s paper.

## Appendix A

### *Sample Story, Questions, and Responses for Study 1*

You are on your way to the library, to bring some books, when you meet a classmate. He tells you that when he went to school this morning, a window was broken. He was



called in by the head teacher, who accused him of breaking the window. But he really did not do it. Nevertheless, the head teacher would not believe him.

1. How does your classmate feel?  
Coded for reference to negative emotion (e.g., ‘angry’, ‘sad’).
2. What would you do or say to your classmate?  
Coded for reference to helping, either by advising (e.g., ‘I say try to tell her the truth, only if you tell another teacher maybe the other teacher will believe you’) or comforting (e.g., ‘I’ll say don’t worry, you know that you didn’t do it’).
3. Why would you do or say this?  
Coded for reference to the victim’s emotional state (e.g., ‘Because he’s feeling upset’).

## Appendix B

### *Sample Stories, Questions, and Responses for Study 2*

*Sample Self-image Story.* Simon/Sally is in the playground. Some big children are playing ball and they let S join their game. They’re all playing together happily when one of the children kicks the ball right up in the air and when it lands, it hits S on the arm. It really hurts, so S is upset. But when one of the big children says, ‘Are you all right?’, S smiles and says, ‘Of course I am. That didn’t hurt at all!’

1. Why did S say to the big children that it didn’t hurt?  
Coded for reference to concern about self-image (e.g., ‘he did not want them to think he was a crybaby’).  
*Other self-image stories:* concealing fear and upset when climbing with others on a high wall; masking trouble with a maths task that others find easy.

*Sample Self-outcome Story.* Matt/Mary is in the playground. There are some children there who are always ready to start a fight with anyone who criticizes them. Today, those children decide to play a practical joke on M. When M is walking round the corner, they suddenly jump up in front of her (him) and shout really loudly in her (his) face. M gets a real fright, and (s)he feels really upset and cross about it. But when (s)he turns to face those children, (s)he just laughs and says ‘Oh, that was a good trick—you really got me!’

1. Why did M say to those children that she thought it was a good trick?  
Coded for reference to a particular situational outcome for the self (e.g., ‘she did not want to get into a fight with them’).  
*Other self-outcome stories:* concealing stomach upset in order to be in a basketball game; concealing upset at someone’s careless behaviour because that person is giving out desired tickets.

*Sample Other-outcome Story.* Anna/Alex is in class. Everyone has been working together to make some party food for a special class party. One group of children in the class gives A a piece of the cake that they worked hard to make for the party. But the cake tastes horrible! A really does not like it. But then, the other children say, ‘Does the cake taste nice?’ A smiles and says to the children ‘Yes, this is a lovely cake!’

1. Why did A say to the children that the cake was lovely?

Coded for reference to a particular outcome for the audience (e.g., 'she did not want them to feel upset').

*Other other-outcome stories:* concealing upset upon receiving disappointing present from well-meaning friends; concealing negative feelings about classmates' singing performance during assembly.

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