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Association of Adolescents' Social Cognitive Orientations and Young Adult Well Being and Adjustment

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Adolescence is a period of development that introduces many cognitive, social, and emotional changes. How well adolescents navigate these changes lays the groundwork of their later development. Research suggests that youth's social-cognitive processes have important implications for their well-being and development (Crick & Ladd, 1994). This study examines the relationships between adolescents' social-cognitive orientations, and how they impact transitioning into adulthood. Relations were examined between adolescent rejection sensitivity, social goals, and problem solving, and adult educational attainment romantic satisfaction, partner problem talk, and emotional adjustment. We predict that participants with adaptive social-cognitive orientations in adolescence will have more successful adjustment into adulthood.

In 2007-2009, data from seventh and tenth graders were collected (Rose et al., 2014). Participants were contacted again as young adults and invited to complete a follow-up questionnaire online. The final sample consisted of 270 participants, 159 girls and 111 boys.

Measures used in the adolescent assessment included the Social Goals Scale (based on Rose & Asher, 2004), Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire (Downey & Feldman, 1996), and the Problem-Solving Inventory (Perez et al., 1997). In young adulthood, participants educational attainment was assessed. They also reported whether they had a romantic relationship and, if so, responded to one item regarding satisfaction. Participants also responded to items from Center for Epidemiologic Studies–Depression Scale (CES–D; Radloff, 1977).

Angry rejection sensitivity was associated with lower levels of romantic satisfaction, however there were no associations between rejection sensitivity and internalizing symptoms. Positive social goals were associated with romantic satisfaction and high educational attainment. Negative goals are associated with conflict resolution in relationships. The underlying dimension of problem-solving conflict is related to higher educational attainment. This research could give new information regarding the importance of fostering positive social cognitive skills and highlight the importance of intervention in adolescence.