

# Shyness, agreeableness and mating effort: Their relationship with adolescent sociometric status

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## Background

Obtaining a measure of an individual's sociometric status reveals how integrated and how well received they are in their peer group. Traditionally this has been achieved through a system of nominations whereby children select three pupils from their class, or year group, whom they like most and like least. There has been considerable research into understanding which attributes of an individual contribute most to their sociometric status. This research has shown that there are greater differences within sociometric groups than between them. The current study investigated sociometric status and friendship numbers alongside self-reported individual differences. The individual differences included personality and mating effort – the latter being relatively neglected in adolescent research. Based on research consistently linking mating effort with offending it was hypothesised that adolescents with high mating effort would have poor sociometric status and few friends. Children involved in extreme delinquency often tend to be unpopular.

## Method

**Participants:** 216 adolescents (47.7% male) mean age 13.9 years. One hundred and five were matched with previously collected self-report data on individual differences and delinquency. **Measures:** Sociometric status was measured using Coie, et al.'s (1982) method. Pupils also provided information about the number of friends they had, and where those friends were located e.g. in the same class. Individual differences data comprised measures of personality (NEO-FFI(R); Costa & McCrae, 2004), intrasexual competition (MES; Rowe, Vazsonyi & Figueredo, 1997), and delinquency (SRED; Moffitt & Silva, 1988). **Procedure:** Data were collected over several visits during June 2004. The sociometric measure and friendship questions were presented on a single sheet and data collection took place in groups of 20 to 25 pupils per session with the pupils' teacher present.

## Discussion

The hypothesis that high mating effort adolescents would be rejected by their peers and have few friends was not supported. Analyses revealed that higher mating effort actually resulted in more friends. Shyness was found to be a better predictor of poor sociometric status and few friends. The results suggest that mating effort may be more complicated than some forensic research has previously implied. Although there is a robust link between mating effort, disagreeableness and offending – mating effort in some adolescents may be a positive quality when associated with characteristics such as leadership and extraversion. The data also imply that shyness may be a significant risk factor for peer rejection regardless of an individual's other qualities.

## Results

**ANOVA**  $F(2, 102)$

No. friends > Extraversion 3.66,  $p = 0.03$

No. friends in school > Extraversion 3.48,  $p = 0.04$

No. friends in school > Mating Effort 3.62,  $p = 0.03$

**Multiple Regression Analyses**

➤ Social Preference (predicted) =

$$0.32 + 0.35_{(\text{agreeable})} - 0.28_{(\text{shy})} - 0.22_{(\text{fights})}$$

➤ Social Impact (predicted) =

$$4.05 + 0.39_{(\text{disruptive})}$$



Competitiveness can manifest in positive ways as well as delinquency. Competitive extraverts are preferred over shy adolescents.

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