



Peeking at the Negative Side of High School Popularity

The prom, along with its endless pre- and post events, is just one more social trial that adolescents face in their school years and yet another test of their relative popularity, of fitting in, of being accepted.

Is popularity always a good thing? And how does it play out in life after high school?

Mitchell J. Prinstein, a professor and director of clinical psychology at the University of North Carolina, outlines the way researchers often look at popularity: there are the students he calls “high status,” like the student council president or the captain of the football team.

“Some of the most popular kids are very much disliked by other kids,” he said. This may be partly envy, but sometimes these standout teenagers can be bullies or part of the mean-girl clique.

Another kind of popularity is what Professor Prinstein calls “likeability.” That is how much a person is liked or preferred by peers — someone other people enjoy hanging out with on a Saturday night.

These teenagers tend to be well-adjusted on many levels, including enjoying good relationships with their parents and other adults, as well as being able to master diverse social situations.

“They tend to be carefully attuned to the norms of their peer group,” said Joseph P. Allen, a professor of psychology at the University of Virginia. “They’re less trendsetters than trend spotters.”

Surveys estimate that about 20 percent of students in any school are highly liked, about 50 percent are average — having some friends, but not necessarily a lot — and the rest are considered neglected or rejected students. These are either ignored or actively disliked.” June 18, 2010

Adapted from <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/19/your-money/19shortcuts.html>