

Social Withdrawal, Friendship, and Depressed Mood in Adolescents

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Social withdrawal and depressed mood

Social withdrawal (inhibited behaviour, shyness, anxious withdrawal, solitude) often is a symptom of depression. However, social withdrawal may also be a predictor of depression. In middle childhood and adolescence one of the salient consequences of social withdrawal is peer rejection. Socially withdrawn children experience more internalizing problems, peer difficulties, and loneliness than other children. It is argued that peers reject socially withdrawn children because their behaviour deviates from age-specific norms and expectations for social interaction. The experience of problematic peer relationships may result in a negative self-concept and a depressed mood in early adolescence.

Rubin, K. H., Coplan, R. J., & Bowker, J. C. (2009). Social withdrawal in childhood. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 60, 141-171.

Friendship as a buffer against depressed mood?

In early adolescence peers become even more important for social development, and depressive symptoms increase in this age group. The presence of a best friend may buffer the effects of negative experiences and thereby prevent the development of depression. Socially withdrawn children often do have at least one best friend. However, these friends are often children who experience the same difficulties as the child. The quality of their friendships tend to be relatively poor, e.g. they lack in helpfulness and in having fun.

Hypothesis:

Friendship quality attenuates the association between social withdrawal and depressed mood.

Method

Participants:

457 adolescents in the third ($n = 165$), fourth ($n = 147$) and fifth year ($n = 145$), aged in range from 13.3 to 18.8 years ($M_{third} = 14,9$ years, $SD = .62$; $M_{fourth} = 15,8$ years; $M_{fifth} = 17,0$ years) of secondary school in The Netherlands; 50% girls

Measures:

Depressed mood (self-report)

Children's Depression Inventory (CDI, Kovačs, 1992; van Leuven & van Beek, 2000); 28 items, rating 0 – 2; alpha .81.

E.g. "feeling sad", "trouble getting along with people"

Social withdrawal (peer nominations)

Revised Class Play Method (Masten, Morison, & Pelligrini, 1985); Sensitive-Isolated scale (adaptation; 11 items, alpha .99)

E.g. "Who in class rather stays alone than with others?" "who is shy?"

Friendship Quality (self-report)

(Parker & Asher, 1993; Stocker, 1994; Windle, 1994). (16 items, alpha .91)

E.g. "I feel happy being with my friend"

Analysis

Hierarchical regression analysis

Results

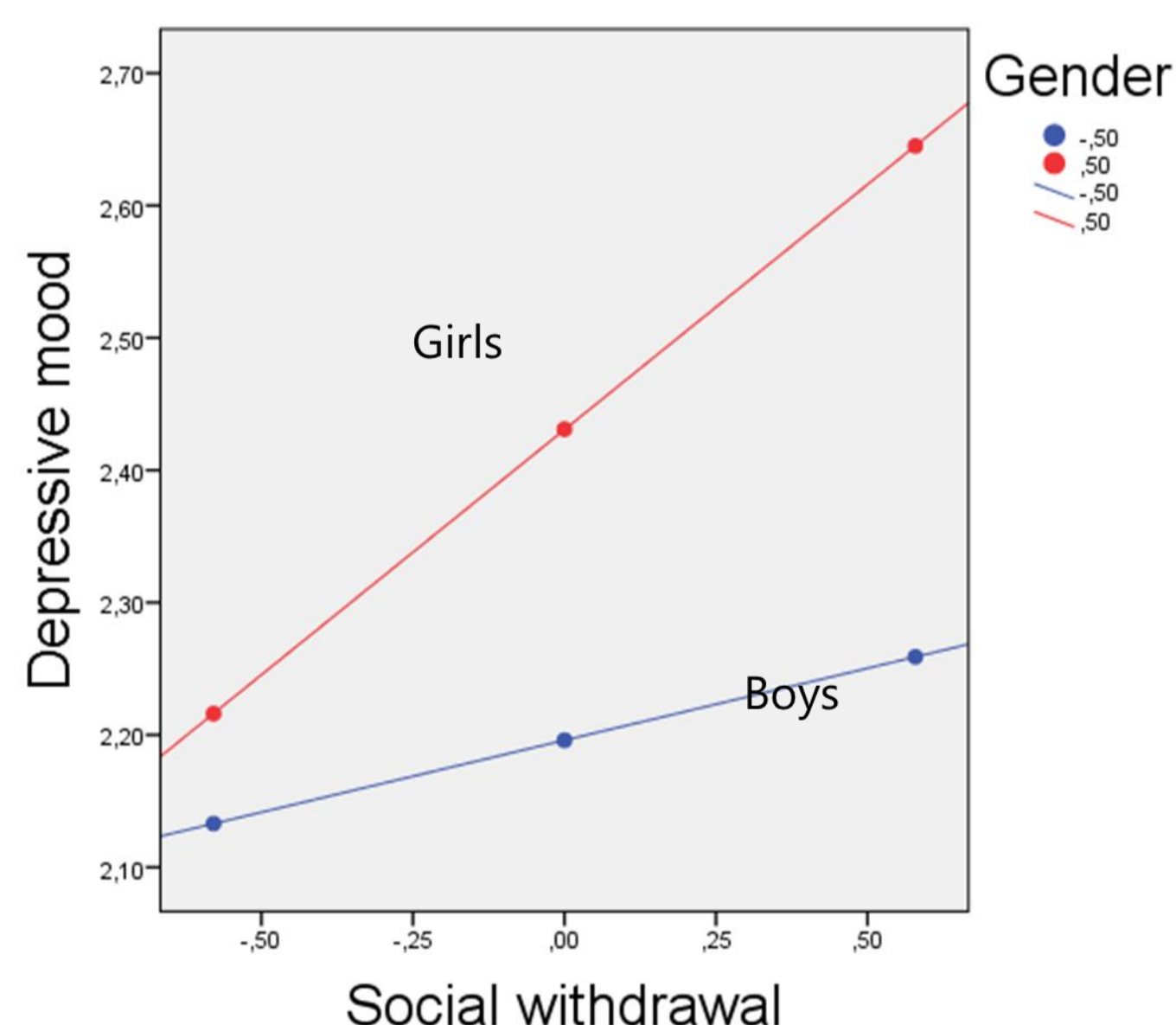


Figure 1. Effects of social withdrawal ($b = .24$, $p < .05$) and gender ($b = .23$, $p < .05$) on depressed mood ($F(3,453) = 3.076$, $p < .05$; $R^2 = .028$).

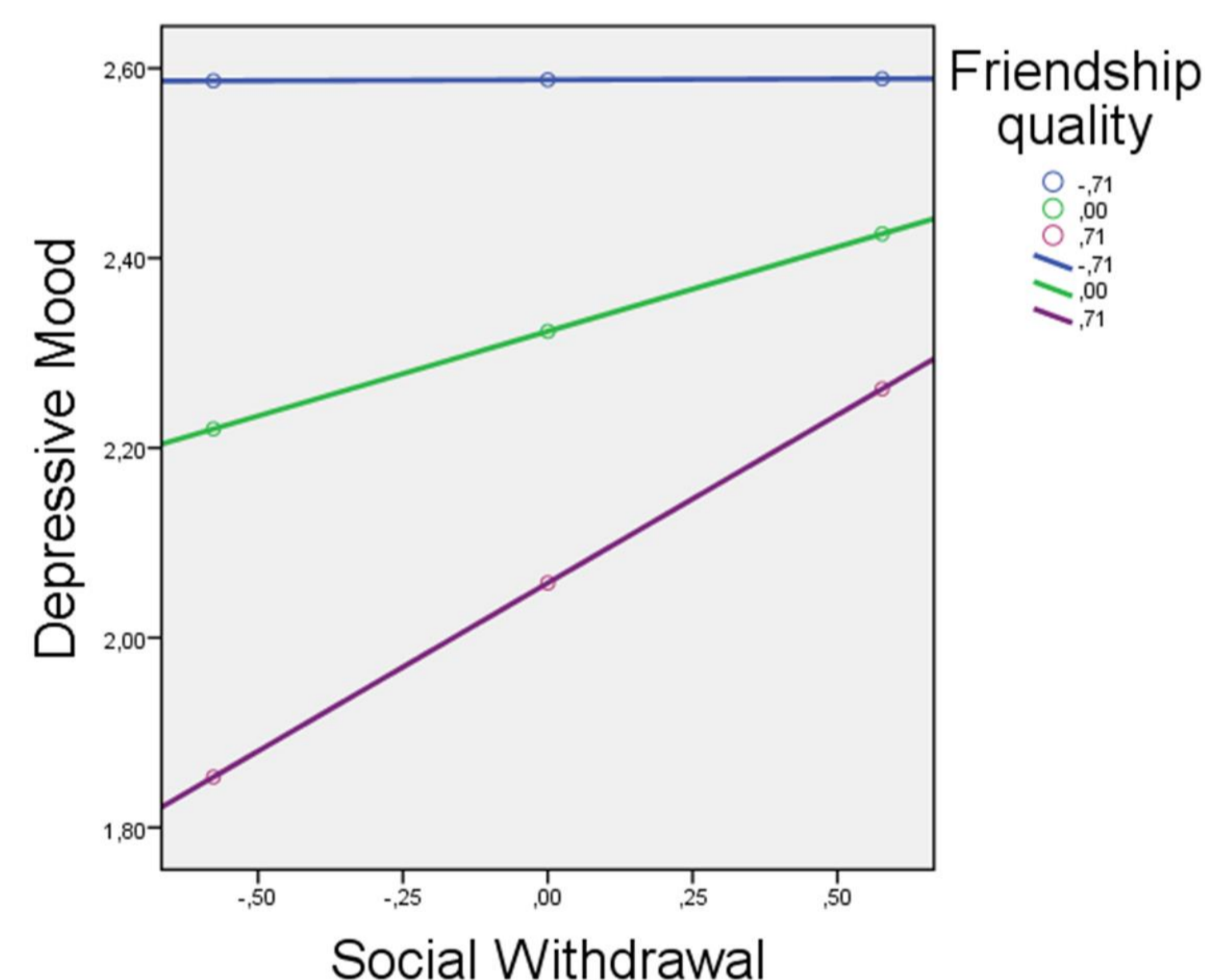
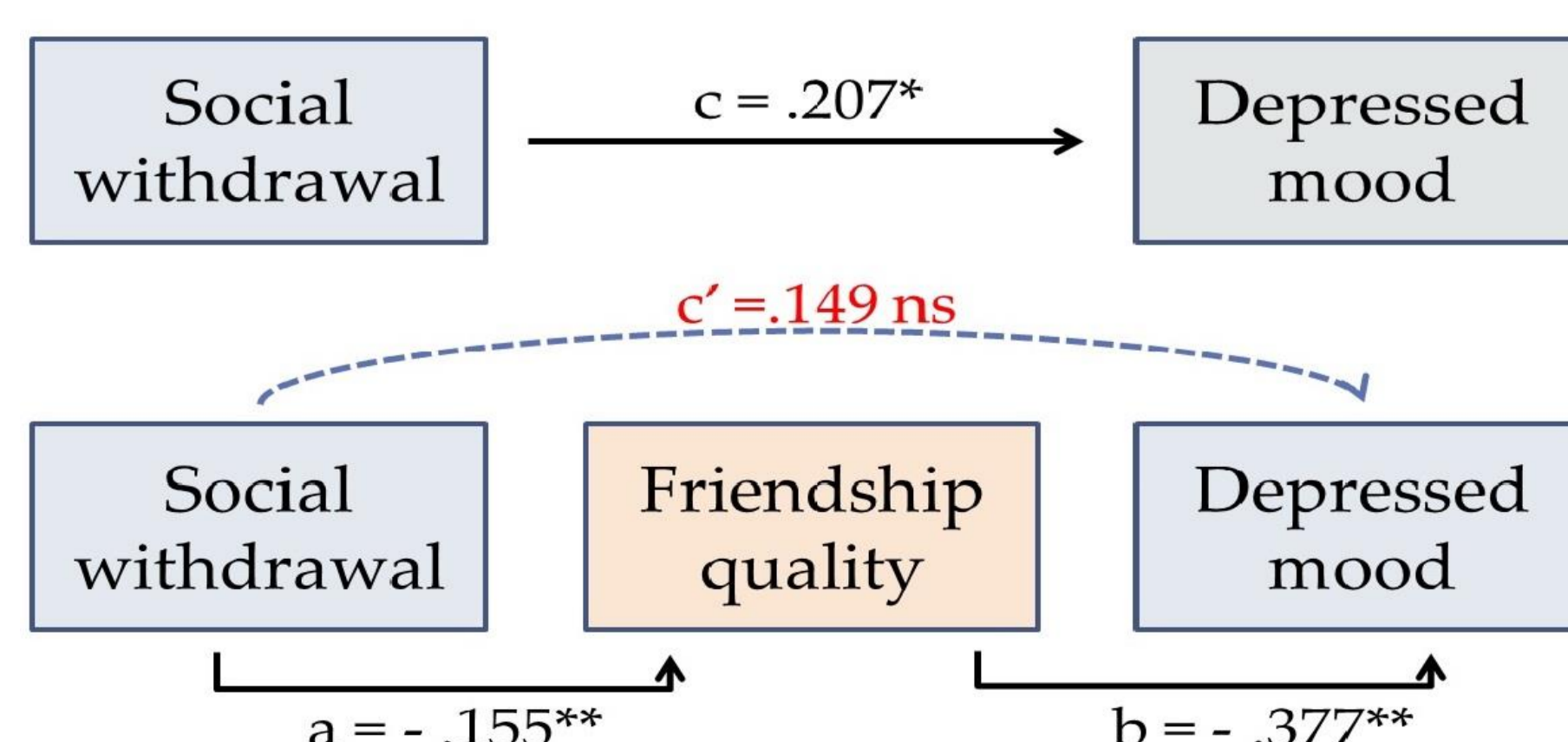


Figure 2. Effects of social withdrawal ($b = .178$, ns) and friendship quality ($b = -.371$, $p < .05$) on depressed mood ($F(3,451) = 9.489$, $p < .01$, $R^2 = .078$).

Figure 3. The association between social withdrawal and depressed mood with friendship quality as a mediator ($F(2,452) = 16.976$, $p < .001$).



* $p < .05$
** $p < .001$

Figure 1:

Social withdrawal and gender related to depressed mood in adolescents, but no significant social withdrawal X gender was found (no moderation).

Figure 2:

Friendship quality (low) related to depressed mood in adolescents, but no significant social withdrawal X friendship quality was found (no moderation).

Figure 3:

Mediation effect: The association between social withdrawal and depressed mood was no longer significant when friendship quality was included in the analysis.

Conclusion

1. Both social withdrawal and friendship quality related to depressed mood in adolescents.
2. Friendship quality did not moderate the association between social withdrawal and depressed mood.
3. Friendship mediated the association between social withdrawal and depressed mood in adolescents.