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January 9, 2008, 10:36 am

## School Popularity Affects Girls' Weights



Among teen girls, notions of popularity may influence weight gain. (Nicole Bengiveno for The New York Times)

Girls who think they aren't popular are at higher risk for weight gain, according to a new study.

It's long been known that being overweight can lead to social exclusion for teens, but in a [study](#) published this week in the Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine, researchers at Harvard University took on a slightly different question: whether a student's perceptions of her social status played a role in her weight.

To find out, the researchers recorded the body mass index of nearly 4,500 girls ages 12 to 18. The teens were also asked to rank themselves from one to 10 in the social hierarchy at their school, based on the following question:

At the top of the ladder are the people in your school with the most respect and the highest standing. At the bottom are people who no one respects and no one wants to hang around with. Where would you place yourself on the ladder?

Two years later, the researchers found, all of the girls had gained weight — no surprise, since they were all growing. But teens who had rated themselves at four or lower had gained more. In fact, girls who thought they were low in the social pecking order were at a 70 percent higher risk of gaining excess weight. The extra weight averaged about 11 pounds, or a two-point increase in BMI scores.

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*“I'll take the fondue pot.”*