



LIFE

ATTENTION POPULAR KIDS: YOUR DAYS ARE NUMBERED (ACCORDING TO SCIENCE)

**NOT THE HOMECOMING QUEEN? DON'T WORRY -- ONE DAY, YOU'LL RULE THE WORLD,
A LEADING UVA RESEARCHER TELLS MTV NEWS.**

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On **Echosmith**'s hit song "Cool Kids," 17-year-old lead singer Sydney Sierota sings about someone who just wants to "be like the cool kids, 'cause all the cool kids ... seem to fit in."

Though it's nearly impossible to define "cool," there's a familiar image that exists in the

pop culture canon (Regina George; Sebastian from "Cruel Intentions"; Draco Malfoy) and being cool is something so many young people grapple with in our teen years and beyond. But MTV News caught up with UVA's Hugh Kelly Professor of Psychology, **Joseph P. Allen**, one of the leaders of a recent study on cool kids, and he explained

there's proof now that trying to conform to the popularized definition of cool doesn't have great -- nor even lasting results.



Beginning in the late-'90s, University of Virginia researchers followed 184 13-year-olds for a decade until they were 23. Last year, their findings were **published** in the very academically titled "What Ever Happened to the "Cool" Kids? Long-Term Sequelae of Early Adolescent Pseudomature Behavior."

According to Allen, you can spot the cool kids from a mile away.

"They're the kids who are trying to act older than they are, and maybe even pulling it off," he explained of teens that exhibit "pseudo-mature behaviors."

"So [the 'cool' kids] are doing the things that older adolescents do at a younger age: the fast parties and the dating early and such," Allen added. "But from everything we can see, they're not doing it because it comes naturally, they're doing it because they think it looks cool." And teens in their younger years are typically drawn to these kids because the perception is that they *are* cool.





Throughout the **course of the study**, researchers "collect[ed] information from the teens themselves as well as from their peers and parents."

And in what's likely to be met with relief by anyone who has ever struggled to fit in, Allen noted that while the stereotypically cool types succeeded when they were very young, "that popularity fades over the next few years and by 16, they're kind of average. And then by the time they're adults, they are really seen as below average socially."



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But there's more. The charade of coolness many teens feel pressured to perform can actually have damaging effects on their social development.

"It seems like they're on the fast track to adulthood. [But] what we learned by following them up into adulthood was that the exact opposite turned out to be true," Allen told MTV News.

"These cool kids weren't on a fast-track, in fact they were on something that was much more like a dead-end path. In adulthood they ended up with higher levels of alcohol and drug use, higher rates of social problems and more criminal behavior. And, interestingly, they refuted by their peers as being less socially confident than average. **So the cool kids ended up being not so cool in the long run.**"

Who succeeds in the world after high school then?

"The kid who seemed like they were kind of quiet and nobody was paying much attention to them, they really blossomed," Allen discovered. "It's not that everybody who was not cool is going to do well, necessarily. What we really find is that it's kids who

learn to work hard and kids who learn to pay attention to friendships, who learn to be loyal friends -- those are the kids who are going to do well socially in the long run."



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It sounds so obvious but, basically, trying to look cool doesn't make you cool -- being yourself does. You have the agency to decide what you're passionate about and the ability to form your own identity around that. And just being genuine will earn you real, lifelong friends.

"What's going to do you well in the long run," Allen explained, "is paying attention to very basic skills that everybody can have. Learning how to be a good friend, learning how to listen to other people, learning how to work hard when you need to work hard, those are the skills that are going to get you somewhere."

Two words: **Do you.**



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