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Authors	Jones, Martin H.;Špes, Tanja;Hsiao, Yu-Yu;Markovič, Rene;Košir, Katja
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Being Popular and Being Liked: Goals, Behaviors, and Norm Salience

Martin H. Jones¹, Tanja Špes², Yu-Yu Hsiao³, Rene Markovič², Katja Košir²

¹University College Cork

²University of Maribor

³University of New Mexico

Author Note

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Martin H. Jones, School of Applied Psychology, University College Cork; Cork, Ireland. Email: mjones@ucc.ie.

Authors' Contributions

M. H. J. conceived of this study, conducted and interpreted statistical analyses, and drafted the manuscript; T. Š. participated in the data collection; Y-Y. H. conducted statistical analyses; R. M. participated in the data collection; K. K. designed the project where this study is part of, participated in the data collection and helped to draft the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Data Sharing Declaration

The datasets generated and/or analyzed during the current study are not publicly available but are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interests.

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Ethical Approval

The study was approved by the local ethics committee at the Faculty of Arts, University of Maribor. Research followed all applicable APA ethical guidelines.

Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained from the parents or legal guardians of all participants, and assent was obtained from the participating adolescents.

Abstract

Youth's social status (popularity and likability) relates with social status goals as well as bullying and prosocial behaviors within the context of classroom norms for bullying and prosocial behaviors, but less clear is how each of these factors interrelate with each other. The current study empirically analyses the concurrent relationships among social status goals, bullying and prosocial behaviors, and classroom norms with social status. Participants were a nationally representative sample of 6,421 Slovenian early adolescents (50% females; $M_{\text{age}} = 13$ years; $SD = 6$ months). Findings indicated that popularity goals were related with bullying behaviors, and bullying behaviors related with popularity. In contrast, likability goals related with prosocial behaviors, and prosocial behaviors related with popularity and likability. The role of classroom norm salience was complex as bullying increased popularity in low-bullying environments, whereas prosocial behaviors enhanced likability in high-prosocial classroom contexts. Students high on both bullying and prosocial behaviors (bistrategic controllers) demonstrated higher popularity and likability compared to their peers., but had similar relationships among their social status goals, bullying and prosocial behaviors, and social status as all other peers. The findings demonstrate a clear relationship among social status goals, bullying and prosocial behaviors, and social status (popularity and likability), while suggesting that classroom norms may differentiate how bullying/prosocial behaviors might align with social status.

Keywords: popularity, likability, social goals, bullying, prosocial behavior

Introduction

Adolescents highly value and attune to social status hierarchies (both popularity and likability), with some adolescents wanting to increase their status (e.g., Yeager et al. 2018). Youth desiring greater status may hold social status goals and employ bullying and prosocial strategies with their peers to improve their social status (Hawley, 2003; Jones & Košir, 2024). However, social status is not solely acquired by the individual, but instead social status is awarded and taken away by others in each social network (Blader & Chen, 2014; Cillessen, 2011). Thus, to some extent, adolescents' classroom peers will deem what interpersonal behaviors are socially appropriate, or the classroom norm salience (Dijkstra & Gest, 2014; Laninga-Wijnen, 2018). The current study examines whether a classroom's norm salience plays a significant role in whether students use bullying and prosocial behavioral tactics in pursuit of their social status goals and, ultimately, acquiring popularity and likability.

Social Status

Social status is the individual's position in the social hierarchy within a given social network(s) (Cillessen, 2011). For the current study, the social status context of interest is the youth's classroom social network. Social status takes two primary forms: popularity and likability (Cillessen, 2009, 2011). Adopting terminology proposed by Cillessen (2011), popularity is the amount of social visibility and social power held by an individual within their social network, or sometimes referred to as social centrality. Likability, or sometimes called social preference, is the amount that a youth is well-regarded by their peers (Cillessen, 2011). Likability is a measure of social acceptance and is usually operationalized as the difference between how well-liked and how disliked a youth is by their social network members.

Popularity and likability are distinct aspects of students' social status in school. Still, popularity and likability are sometimes related with each other, such as when a student is both well-known and well-liked by classmates (van den Berg, 2020). In an opposite fashion, some adolescents are very popular, but not well-liked by their peers (van den Berg, 2020). In tandem, including both popularity and likability provides a more comprehensive picture of youth's social status among their peers.

Social Status Goals, Bullying, and Prosocial Behaviors

Goal theory suggests that individuals hold personal desires in hopes of acquiring a given outcome, which in turn affects psychosocial processes (Austin & Vancouver, 1996). Goal theory works in accordance with social cognitive theory, which suggests that reciprocal interactions help explain the relationships between the self (i.e., social status goals), behaviors (bullying or prosocial behaviors), and the environment (classroom norm salience; Bandura, 1986). In combination, goal theory and social cognitive theory suggest a theoretical process by which individuals hold and pursue the acquisition of social status, while also acknowledging the reciprocity of the environment on both the self and individuals' behaviors (Bandura, 1986). The environment (social network members) rewards behaviors (e.g. bullying or prosocial behaviors) by increasing the social status of the individual (self), and reciprocally the self's beliefs (social status goals) align with behaviors (bullying or prosocial behaviors), which may further enhance the response of the environment (social network members) giving greater social status. It is also possible that the social network decreases the person's social status if the person uses behaviors misaligned with the environmental values (i.e., norm salience) of the social network.

According to goal theory, a student's current popularity and likability may have theoretically begun with the youth holding a desired outcome, or goal, regarding their social

status. These social status goals can include both popularity and likability as well as wanting to improve or retain their popularity and likability (Li & Wright, 2014). There are multiple social status goals, but most relevant to the current study are popularity goals and likability goals.

Popularity Goals. Popularity goals include an individuals' personal aspirations to increase their social status and power within the social hierarchy (Dawes, 2017; Kiefer & Wang, 2016). Students with popularity goals may use aggression and bullying as tactics in acquiring popularity (Dawes, 2017; Kiefer & Wang, 2016). These bullying behavior tactics are often successful as students regularly report bullies as being some of the most popular and well-known classmates starting as early as age six throughout adolescence (Closson, 2009; Stoltz et al., 2016). While bullying is a successful tactic for acquiring popularity, bullies often have low likability among their peers (Dawes, 2017; Estell et al., 2002).

Likability Goals. Likability goals appear when a youth wants to be more well-liked or perceived as being nice and kind by others (Dawes, 2017). Those with likability goals often employ prosocial behaviors (Dawes, 2017; Dawes & Xie, 2014). Youth with likability goals use behavioral strategies to accomplish their desire for increasing being liked by helping classmates and being emotionally supportive of others (Closson, 2009; Lansu, 2023). The pursuit of likability goals and prosocial behaviors leads to greater likability from classmates (Ojanen & Findley-Van Nostrand, 2014). However, prosocial behaviors that are motivated by likability goals do not always lead to greater popularity (Closson, 2009; Dijkstra & Gest, 2014).

Bistrategic Controllers. Some students use a mixture of both bullying and prosocial behaviors with their classmates and close friends, and are termed bistrategic controllers (Hawley, 2003; Hawley & Bower, 2018). Bistrategic controllers pursue social status by tactically employing physical and social aggression with some students, while using more prosocial

behaviors with others (Closson, 2009; Hawley, 2003; Lansu, 2023). They know when and with whom to use bullying and aggressive behaviors, or when to be helpful and emotionally supportive, in order to gain or maintain their social status. The successful combination of bullying and prosocial behaviors can lead to greater popularity (Closson, 2009; Lansu, 2023) but it has not been fully accounted for within classroom norm salience. The norm salience of classrooms may provide additional information regarding when social status goals, bullying and prosocial behaviors, or the employment of both bullying and prosocial behaviors (i.e., bistrategic controller behaviors) may align with youths' social status.

Norm Salience

Norms salience includes both formal and informal social rules (both beliefs and behaviors) that members of the social network consensually deem are appropriate or inappropriate (Correia, 2022; Dijkstra & Gest, 2014; Kallgren, et al., 2000). Norm salience can be measured as the average score of social network members, as in the present study, or by measuring the correlation between individuals and the average score of social network members (Dijkstra & Gest, 2014; Kallgren, et al., 2000). In addition, norm salience also includes both injunctive and descriptive norms. The former refer to beliefs about the acceptability of a particular behavior, whereas the latter relate to the actual average level of that behavior in the classroom (Pouwels & Garandeau, 2021). For example, students in a classroom may consensually agree that bullying is wrong, while also actively using bullying tactics among their peers.

Norm salience does not alter behavior indiscriminately. Instead, norm salience can alter behaviors when individuals focus on a specific and targeted behavior/value from the larger social context (Kallgren et al., 2000). Further, norm salience may change behaviors only when

considering the interaction between an individuals' behavior and norm salience (Dijkstra et al., 2008; Dijkstra & Gest, 2014). This occurs for youth whose aggression and bullying tactics align with classroom and social settings that have higher rates of aggression (Correia et al., 2019; Dijkstra & Gest, 2014). Further, norm salience can interact with students' social status, such that peers acquire behaviors and values when more popular peers employ such behaviors deemed acceptable by classroom norm salience (Rambaran et al., 2013). Thus, and in line with social cognitive theory, norm salience reciprocally interacts with individuals' behaviors (e.g., the use of bullying behaviors) and social status to help predict the usage of certain behaviors to gain or lose social status. Less understood is how the social status goals might also align with the interaction between behaviors and norm salience to predict social status.

Current Study

Extant literature has yet to examine the concurrent relationships of social status goals, bullying and prosocial behaviors, and norm salience to predict youth's social status. Goal theory and social cognitive theory suggest that social status goals should align with behaviors that may help the individual acquire their desired outcome (social status), but only when considering classroom norm salience. To examine this possibility, the study tested four hypotheses. It was hypothesized that popularity goals would predict bullying, whereas likability goals would predict prosocial behaviors (Hypothesis 1). The second hypothesis was that bullying interactions with bullying norm salience would be related to popularity, whereas prosocial behaviors would interact with prosocial norm salience to predict likability (Hypothesis 2). The third hypothesis was that interactions between behaviors and norm salience will be stronger in predicting social status than considering behaviors or norm salience without interactions (Hypothesis 3). Finally, students high on both bullying and prosocial behaviors (i.e. bistrategic controllers) were

hypothesized to have higher social status goals as well as higher social status than non-bistrategic controllers, but the relationships among social status goals, behaviors, and social status would be comparable (Hypothesis 4). If the hypotheses are correct, then results might better highlight how youth pursue social status and employ bullying and prosocial behaviors toward in pursuits of their social status goals.

Methods

Participants and Procedure

Data came from a nationally representative study of Slovenian youth. The study included schools that (1) responded to an invitation to participate and (2) obtained at least 90% parental consent for students within individual classes. This produced an initial sample of 6,551 students. However, participants who had less than an 80% answer rate on questionnaire items were excluded from further analysis. The current study, therefore, included a nationally representative sample of 6,421 youth from 328 classrooms in 118 schools across Slovenia (around 26% of all public schools¹). The average age was 13 years old ($SD = 6$ months; range from 12-16 years old). Participants' gender was 3,209 males (49.9%) and 3,211 females (50.1%); one student reporting as nonbinary (0.1 %). Most of the students spoke Slovenian at home (75.3%). Reported ethnicities were 88.5% Slovenian, 5.1% two or more ethnicities (including Slovenian with another ethnicity, 3% Bosnians, 3.4% all other ethnicities (e.g., Serbian, Albanian, etc.), and all other ethnicity and demographic data missing at random.

The study was conducted in schools by coordinators (school counselors) who received online training from the second and last author. School coordinators had uniform instructions for study implementation. Students completed a battery of questionnaires using paper and pencil

¹ 99 % of schools in Slovenia are public schools (Taštanoska, 2021).

surveys. The study received prior approval from the local research ethics committee. Data collection occurred between October and December 2022.

Measures

Social Status Goals

Two social status goals appear in the current study: popularity goals and social preference goals. The social preference goal is renamed as a likability goal both here and throughout the remainder of the paper in keeping with the naming rationales of Cillessen (2011). Popularity and likability scales were previously validated (Li & Wright, 2014; Wright et al., 2014).

The popularity goal scale had six items. An example item is, “I want to be well-known among my classmates.” The internal consistency of the popularity goal scale was $\alpha = .84$. The likability goal scale had five items ($\alpha = .74$). One item from the likability goal scale stated, “I want to be accepted by my classmates.” Both the popularity goal and likability goal scales had a five-point Likert response from 1 = never to 5 = all the time.

Bullying Behaviors

Bullying behaviors came from the Adolescent Peer Relations Instrument (APRI). The APRI was developed by Parada (2000) and further validated (Balan, et al., 2022). The APRI has three bullying scales related to physical, verbal, and social behaviors. The current study combined these scales together due to high inter-scale correlations (r 's .55-.73). The final scale included 18 items, such as “In the last two months I... made rude remarks at a student” and “In the last two months...I got into a physical fight with a student because I didn't like them.” Responses were on a six-point Likert scale from 1 = never to 6 = every day ($\alpha = .90$).

Prosocial Behaviors

Prosocial behaviors came from students reporting on classmates' behaviors. Youth reported nominations for classmates that exhibited prosocial behaviors. Participants nominated up to three classmates after the prompt, "Who is kind to others and helps them?"

Social Status

Popularity and likability were the two measures of social status in the current study. Popularity came from students reporting, "Who is the most popular in your class?" Participants could answer up to three people for being popular. Likability came from the differences of two student reports. Students responded to, "Name three of your classmates you like to hang out with" and "Name three of your classmates you don't like to hang out with." A difference score between nominations to "...hang out with" and "...don't like to hang out with" created a measure of likability. Nominations were standardized for both popularity and likability per classroom to account for differences in classroom size with procedures developed by Velásquez et al. (2013). Popularity and likability procedures follow previously validated procedures for measuring social status (Cillessen & Marks, 2011). Previous studies indicated that the perceptions and behavioral correlates of both measures of social status among Slovenian adolescents are like those reported in other samples (e.g., Košir et al., 2020; Košir et al., 2022).

Norm Salience

Norm salience in the current study involved descriptive norms for both bullying and prosocial behaviors. Bullying norm salience were the average scores of all classmates' individual bullying behavior, whereas prosocial behaviors were the average of peer nominations of prosocial behaviors. Norm salience for both bullying and prosocial behaviors required adjustment to account for independence among predictor and outcome variables. Hence, bullying and prosocial norm salience included the average score of all classmates minus the given

individual student's own score (Jones, Alexander, & Estell, 2010). The calculation is as follows: assuming the average number of bullying behaviors in classroom k is $\bar{X}_k$ and student i reported X_i numbers of bullying behaviors. The classroom bullying environment for student i was defined as:

$$\frac{(\bar{X} * n) - X_i}{n - 1}, \quad (1)$$

where n represented the number of students in the classroom. The same process occurred for prosocial behavior.

Data Analysis

First, bullying behaviors, prosocial behaviors, popularity, and likability were standardized by classroom using procedures developed by Velásquez et al. (2013) to account for differences in classroom size (e.g., a larger classroom could provide more raw nominations for popularity than smaller classrooms). Next, a series of path analyses tested relationships between students' social status goals, bullying and prosocial behaviors, and the two outcome variables: popularity and likability. The first path analysis included the relationship among the social status goals, bullying and prosocial behaviors, and social status outcomes. The second path analysis model added the two interaction variables: students' bullying and prosocial behaviors with their respective norm saliences. The final set of analyses examined bistrategic controllers.

All path analyses utilized multiple model fit indices to determine how well the data fit the hypothesized models. The model fit indices were the chi-square test and two local fit indices. The two local fit indices were comparative fit index (CFI) and root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA). The CFI and RMSEA help compensate for the chi-square test being overly sensitive to large datasets (Kenny, 2011). The recommended acceptable model fit indices are $RMSEA < .10$ (Browne & Cudeck, 1993; McDonald & Ho, 2002; Marsh, Wen, & Hau, 2004)

and CFI > .90 (Hu & Bentler, 1999). All statistics were analyzed with SPSS version 29.01 and AMOS version 29.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Given extant research suggesting gender differences in certain aspects of students' social interactions at school (Rose & Smith, 2018; Salmivalli & Peets, 2018), preliminary analyses tested for potential gender differences among all variables. An omnibus MANOVA suggested significant differences among males and females (the lone nonbinary student was omitted due to low cell size) between their social status goals (popularity and likability goals), prosocial and bullying behaviors, and both social status outcomes (popularity and likability), $F(6, 6239) = 199.91, p < .001$. Post-hoc ANOVA analyses suggested significant differences for all variables except likability social status. See Table 3 for effect sizes and all post-hoc ANOVA tests. Given these gender differences, future analyses account for gender (see Figures 1-3).

Goals, Behaviors, and Social Status

The first model tested whether social status goals (popularity and likability goals) related with bullying and prosocial behaviors, and then if these behaviors related with social status (popularity and likability). Results of the first model fit the data well, $\chi^2(4, N = 6786) = 90.14, p < .001$, CFI = .99, RMSEA = .06 (.05, .07). As Figure 1 illustrates, popularity goals positively related with bullying behaviors, and bullying behaviors positively related with popularity. Likability goals related positively with prosocial behaviors. In turn, prosocial behaviors aligned with greater likability as well as higher popularity. In contrast, popularity goals and likability goals negatively related with bullying and prosocial behaviors, respectively. Popularity and

likability goals positively aligned with their respective social status as well as prosocial behaviors positively aligned with popularity.

Goals, Behaviors, and Social Status: Norm Salience

The second path analysis built from the first model with the addition of descriptive norm salience for classrooms. The data fit the model well, $\chi^2(12, N = 6,786) = 308.65, p < .001$, CFI = .96, RMSEA = .06 (.06, .07). As seen in Figure 2, social status goals aligned with behaviors in a similar fashion as model 1, and bullying and prosocial behaviors aligned with popularity and likability social status as in the first model. Also similar to the first model, the second model suggested that social status goals had a continued small relationship with social status.

Norm salience for bullying had significant negative associations with popularity and likability social status, but these coefficients are small and likely only significant due to sample size. Prosocial norm salience had no relationship with either popularity or likability social status. These findings suggest that bullying and prosocial norm salience have limited direct associations with social status. That model two found a positive association between bullying norm salience and bullying behaviors as well as a negative association between prosocial behaviors and prosocial norm salience suggests a relationship between norm salience and individual behaviors. This leaves open the possibility that an interaction could exist between classroom norms and individual behaviors that could align with social status.

Goals, Behaviors, and Social Status: Behavior x Norm Salience

The third model addressed the issue of whether the interaction of youth's behavior and classroom norms could better explain youth's popularity and likability. Specifically, the third model hoped to address the research question regarding whether the norm salience of a classroom interacting with students' own behaviors to better predict social status. Thus, the third

model includes two interaction variables: bullying x classroom bullying norm salience and prosocial behaviors x classroom prosocial behaviors normal salience. These two interaction variables might help show if bullying behaviors might improve social status in a classroom with greater bullying behavior, or if utilizing more prosocial behaviors in a classroom with higher prosocial behaviors would help gain social status.

The third path analysis had good model fit indices, $\chi^2(8, N = 6,786) = 253.88, p < .001$, CFI = .99, RMSEA = .07 (.06, .08). As seen in Figure 3, popularity goals positively related with the bullying norm salience interaction variable, while likability goals positively connected with the prosocial norm salience interaction variable. The bullying norm salience interaction variable negatively related with popularity, whereas the prosocial norm salience interaction variable positively related with likability.

The third model continued similar associations among social status variables and prosocial and bullying behaviors that occurred in models one and two. The path coefficients among social status goals and prosocial and bullying behaviors were greater than direct paths from social status goals to social status. That significant direct paths between social status goals and social status suggests that social status goals remain an important predictor of social status that are not solely accounted for by bullying and prosocial behaviors as well as bullying and prosocial norm salience.

Comparing Models

After testing all three models, chi-square difference tests compared whether certain models had better fit with the data than other models. Model fit tests would indicate whether including norm salience or including an interaction with norm salience and behaviors would be better than a model omitting both norm salience and all interactions. The first chi-square

difference test suggested significant differences between models one and two (models with and without norm salience), $\Delta\chi^2 = 218.51$, $\Delta df = 8$, $p < .001$, with model one (not having norm salience) having a stronger fit with the data.

The second model comparison was between model two (norm salience without behavior interaction) and model three (norm salience with behavior interactions). A significant difference between models two and three suggested model three had better fit, $\Delta\chi^2 = 54.77$, $\Delta df = 4$, $p < .001$. The final comparison among models suggested significant differences between model one (no norm salience and no interactions between norm salience and behaviors) and model three (norm salience with behaviors interactions), $\Delta\chi^2 = 163.74$, $\Delta df = 4$, $p < .001$. The first model had significantly better model fit than the third model.

Results of the model comparisons suggest that the inclusion of interaction terms between behaviors and classroom norms did not improve the relationships between social status goals, behaviors, and social status. In addition, model two, which included classroom norm salience, did not provide better fit than the first model that did not have classroom norm salience. The difference among models does not fully negate the role of classroom norms since the second and third models had good model fit and makes theoretical sense (for further explanations, see discussion section). Rather, the difference between models suggests that a simpler relationship between goals and behaviors aligning with social status fits the data better than including classroom norm saliences or interaction terms between behavior and norm salience.

Bistrategic Controllers

The final analysis involved the examination of bistrategic controllers. Following procedure developed by Hawley (2003), youth with both bullying and prosocial behaviors in the 66th percentile of their classroom garnered a bistrategic controller identification. This

identification process produced 292 bistrategic controllers (3.6% of all students). There was no difference in the number of male and female bistrategic controllers, $\chi^2(1, N = 6,786) = 0.02, p = .89$.

The next test examined whether bistrategic controllers and non-bistrategic controllers differed in their social status goals, bullying and prosocial behaviors, and social status. A Multiple Analysis of Variances (MANOVA) suggested significant difference between bistrategic and non-bistrategic controllers' social status goals and social status, $F(6, 6267) = 121.93, p < .001$. Bistrategic controllers had significantly higher popularity goals ($d = .55$) and likability goals ($d = .34$). Bistrategic controllers reported more bullying behaviors ($d = .93$) and more prosocial behaviors ($d = .99$). In addition, bistrategic controllers had significantly higher social status for both popularity ($d = .38$) and likability ($d = .61$).

Analyses between bistrategic and non-bistrategic controllers concluded with a multigroup path analysis comparison. The analysis would see if bistrategic and non-bistrategic controllers differed in their relationships among social status goals, behaviors, and social status. The multigroup path analysis comparison utilized the model 1 structure since prior analyses determined model 1 to have the best model data fit. Multigroup analyses initially compared the unconstrained and fully constrained models, which resulted in a significant difference between bistrategic controllers and non-bistrategic controllers: $\Delta\chi^2 = 33.80, \Delta df = 15, p = .004$. Analyses suggested that bistrategic and non-bistrategic controllers significantly differed on only one path. Bistrategic controllers had a smaller coefficient between prosocial behaviors and likability ($\beta = .19, p = .002$) than non-bistrategic controllers ($\beta = .31, p < .001$). The final model fit was good, $\chi^2(9, N = 6,786) = 162.84, p < .001, CFI = .97, RMSEA = .05 (.05, .06)$.

Discussion

Adolescents place a large emphasis on social status and employ a variety of behavioral techniques in acquiring social status. The pursuit of social status may include prosocial and bullying behaviors, or a combination of both, to increase one's popularity and likability among peers (French et al., 2022; Hawley, 2003). Peers, in turn, help develop norm salience regarding what is deemed socially acceptable behaviors in given social settings, such as their classrooms (Dijkstra & Gest, 2014). The current study builds upon this extant literature in suggesting that social status goals might be related to bullying and prosocial behaviors, which in turn help predict social status when considering the role of norm salience. In addition, the study examined the relationship of social status goals, bullying/prosocial behaviors, and social status amongst bistrategic controllers.

Results of the study supported some of the hypotheses, but other findings were not in line with expectations. The results were consistent with the hypothesis that popularity goals would align with bullying behaviors as well as likability goals relating with prosocial behaviors. Hypothesizing that bullying and prosocial behaviors would be related to popularity and likability, respectively, proved to be partially correct. The hypothesis that norm salience would interact with bullying and prosocial behaviors to predict social status was partially supported. Results suggested that an interaction between prosocial behaviors and prosocial norm salience related with popularity and likability. In line with assumptions, bistrategic controllers had higher social status goals and social status (i.e. both popularity and likeability). Taken in sum, the study does provide a greater understanding for how adolescents' social status goals align with bullying and prosocial behaviors in predicting social status, while suggesting that norm salience may have a lesser role in these associations.

Goals, Behaviors, and Status

Using bullying and prosocial behaviors to gain social status in adolescence is not a novel finding as extant research clearly shows these relationships (Dawes, 2017; Kiefer & Wang, 2016). Further, the current findings are also not new in supporting past work suggesting that bullying and prosocial behaviors can lead to greater popularity and likability (Lansu, 2023; Stoltz et al., 2016). Instead, what the current study builds upon limited extant literature for is a possible three-step process, or model, for pursuing and acquiring social status.

Current findings utilize goal theory and social cognitive theory to suggest that bullying and prosocial behaviors can be used strategically in support of pursuing social status goals in the hopes of being popular and well-liked by others. Goal theory and social cognitive theory suggest that individuals hold psychological desires, and that these desires reciprocally interact with behaviors and environmental factors (Austin & Vancouver, 1996; Bandura, 1986). Current findings utilize goal theory and social cognitive theory in suggesting that youth hold social status goals (popularity and likability) and employ specific behaviors (bullying and prosocial behaviors) in pursuit of a social status derived from the environment (popularity and/or likability within the social network). These findings expand a limited amount of research suggesting the inclusion of all three factors (goals, behaviors, and social status; Malamut et al., 2023). Current findings and theoretical support imply that adolescents' intentionally hold and pursue social status goals, while employing bullying and prosocial behaviors, to acquire the desired social status.

The current findings are less clear in the role of environmental factors affecting the relationships among social status goals, bullying and prosocial behaviors, and social status. Social cognitive theory suggests that environmental factors should reciprocally interact with the self (social status goals) and behaviors (bullying and prosocial behaviors). The current study

partially supports the role of environmental factors, particularly the role of descriptive norm salience interacting with bullying and prosocial behaviors. Instead, norm salience had a more complicated relationship with social status goals, prosocial and bullying behaviors, and social status than initially hypothesized.

Norm Salience

The current study's second and third models hoped to show whether descriptive norm salience of classrooms might better explain youth's bullying and prosocial behaviors and social status. The inclusion of norm salience might support past research suggesting that social status aligns with the use of socially accepted behaviors (Correia et al., 2019; Dijkstra & Gest, 2014). The current results only partially supported these past works. The results of the second model suggested norm salience had a differential role between behaviors and social status, with norm salience not relating with social status but corresponding with bullying and prosocial behaviors. Thus, norm salience may alter individuals' bullying and prosocial behaviors (e.g., Kallgren et al., 2000), but social status does not relate with the bullying and prosocial norm salience of the classroom.

The third model provided more clarity for how norm salience might relate with the social status by including interactions terms of norm salience and their respective bullying and prosocial behaviors. However, current results were not in line with some aspects of past research (Correi, et al., 2019; Dijkstra & Gest, 2014; Rambaran et al., 2013). In particular, results suggest the interaction of bullying and norm salience for bullying was negatively related to popularity. This suggests that popularity decreases when bullying in classrooms high in bullying behaviors. Another interpretation is that bullying may be successful in gaining popularity only in classrooms where bullying is less frequently used. In contrast, adolescents using prosocial

behaviors in a classroom with high prosocial behaviors had higher likability and popularity social status. Therefore, a student must know whether the classroom is high in either bullying or prosocial behavior in order to successfully employ their own behavioral tactics that align with social status.

It should be noted that the second and third models in the current study, ultimately, had significantly worse fit with the data than the first model. This suggests that a simpler solution explains the relationship from goals to behaviors to social status. Completely negating the role of norm salience may be unwise as past research provides additional insight for when and how norm salience might matter. Norm salience alters behaviors when the individual focuses on a targeted value from the norm salience (Kallgren et al., 2000), or when popular students transmit values to the larger classroom norms (Rambaran et al., 2013). The current study did not prime participants toward a given social status goal or bullying/prosocial behavior, which may be needed to prompt the role of norm salience (Kallgren et al., 2000). The study also did not target only the highly popular students, but instead included all classmates. Future research could examine how either priming norm salience or the role of popular peers alters how norm salience aligns with bullying and prosocial behaviors.

A different way of understanding norm salience in the current study is going beyond the assumption that norm salience offers possibilities for the modeling and acquisition of certain socially appropriate behaviors (Dijkstra & Gest, 2014; Kallgren et al., 2000). Rather, a strategic youth may use specific behaviors in consideration of the classroom norm salience to help them accomplish their social status goals. Indeed, results of the study suggest preliminary evidence that this may be occurring. It may be that students with popularity goals know when to use bullying and prosocial behaviors within their given classroom social norms, such as using

bullying behaviors amongst peers who do not bully very often to gain popularity (or being prosocial among those classmates who value prosocial behaviors to gain likability). Additional research is needed to confirm this assumption, but extant research on bistrategic controllers suggests this possibility (Hawley, 2003; Lansu, 2023).

Bistrategic Controllers

Bistrategic controllers tactically employ aggression, bullying, and prosocial behaviors to acquire and maintain social status (Hawley, 2003). The study's current findings support and extend this past work on bistrategic controllers by suggesting that bistrategic controllers have greater social status goals, greater bullying and prosocial behaviors, and have greater popularity and likability than non-bistrategic controllers. Further, current findings suggest that bistrategic controllers' associations among social status goals, bullying and prosocial behaviors, and social status are comparable with other students (though the bistrategic controllers have a smaller association between prosocial behaviors and likability).

Given past research (e.g., Hawley, 2003), it may be that bistrategic controllers know when and how to use specific behavioral tactics among peers to acquire their social status. That is, bistrategic controllers hold dual social status goals, and then can be successful in garnering popularity and likability by knowing when and how to use bullying and prosocial behaviors more so than their peers (Hawley, 2003; Lansu, 2023). The current study supports these past findings, while adding that the relationships between social status goals, behaviors, and social status are comparable between bistrategic controllers and non-bistrategic controllers. The difference between bistrategic controllers and all other students appears to be more in the levels of variables than in the relationships among variables, with bistrategic controllers having greater social status goals, behaviors, and social status.

Limitations and Future Directions

The study helps inform the extant literature by suggesting relationships between social status goals, bullying and prosocial behaviors, and popularity and likability, while finding that norm salience has less of a relationship than hypothesized. These findings do have some notable limitations regarding methodological choices. The study design was cross-sectional and non-experimental, so the study excludes longitudinal or causal results. Extant theory and current finding suggest the possibility of a three-step process (goals, behaviors, and social status), but this needs additional research to support whether a three-step process exists and causal relationships among the three-step process.

The study includes two different types of behavioral measurements. Bullying behaviors are self-reported, whereas prosocial behaviors are from peer-reports. Unfortunately, the study did not include self-reports of prosocial behaviors. This choice meant relying on peer reports for prosocial behavior. Future work should consider comparing potential differences in how self-reported and peer-reported bullying and prosocial behaviors align with social status and norm salience. There is limited extant research to guide the current study as to whether the differences would be meaningful or not, but more empirical work might clarify this issue.

The study did not report results regarding multi-level analyses. Multilevel analyses were initially attempted, but the homogeneity among participants' schools and classrooms meant multilevel analyses could not be used. This is not uncommon in Slovenia where schools have greater student homogeneity than other countries (e.g., USA). The homogeneity among Slovenian schools impairs the ability to more deeply examine how contexts might alter the relationships among social status goals, bullying/prosocial behaviors, and social status. Instead,

the current study can only comment on the role of classroom norm saliences and individuals' behaviors.

Finally, the study utilized a nationally representative sample of Slovenian youth. As, according to social-cognitive theory, environment plays a role in shaping behaviors and norms, the results should be generalized across cultures with caution. It may be possible that behaviors and norm salience vary from Slovenia to other countries. There may also be differences in developmental stages and genders since adolescence puts a greater value on social status than childhood and adulthood and some differences exist among genders' social interactions. The current study could not address developmental differences due to its cross-sectional nature. Replicating the current study across cultures and developmental stages may better highlight the role of social status and norm salience within cultures and across developmental stages.

Conclusion

Past research examined social status goals, behaviors associated with social status, and norm salience independently, but few studies have investigated how these three factors jointly predict social status. The current study suggests that youth's social status relates with both social status goals and the use of bullying and prosocial behaviors. The role of classroom norm salience appears to play less of a role in these relationships, though does play some role. Bistrategic controllers—students who adeptly use both bullying and prosocial behaviors—differed from their other classmates by being both more popular and more well-liked, but did not differ much in their relationships among social status goals, behaviors, and social status. These findings support extant work that students hold social status goals that relate with specific bullying and prosocial behaviors which relate with popularity and likability. In the case of bistrategic controller youth, this alignment appears to likely be a deliberate strategy.

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Table 1

Descriptive Statistics

	<u>Male</u>				<u>Female</u>				All students	
	Non-bistrategic controller <i>n</i> = 3089		Bistrategic controller <i>n</i> = 121		Non-bistrategic controller <i>n</i> = 3092		Bistrategic controller <i>n</i> = 119			
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Popularity goals	2.56	.87	3.07	.90	2.35	.82	2.81	.85	2.48	.86
Likability goals	3.66	.87	4.02	.66	3.89	.76	4.06	.71	3.78	.83
Bullying behavior	1.61	.66	2.12	.72	1.30	.40	1.91	.46	1.48	.58
Prosocial behavior	1.51	1.99	5.50	2.44	3.17	3.28	5.91	2.49	2.40	2.87
Popularity	2.52	3.76	4.22	4.67	1.76	2.96	2.87	3.37	2.152	3.42
Likability	.27	3.95	2.48	3.32	.32	3.74	2.49	2.80	.31	3.86

Table 2

Correlations Among Variables

	Popularity goals	Likability goals	Bullying behavior	Prosocial behavior	Popularity	Likability
Popularity goals	--					
Likability goals	.50**	--				
Bullying behavior	.25**	-.10**	--			
Prosocial behavior	-.00	.20**	-.17**	--		
Popularity	.17**	.07**	.19**	.14**	--	
Likability	.09**	.15**	.02	.32**	.25**	--

Note. ** $p < .01$

Table 3

Gender Differences for All Variables

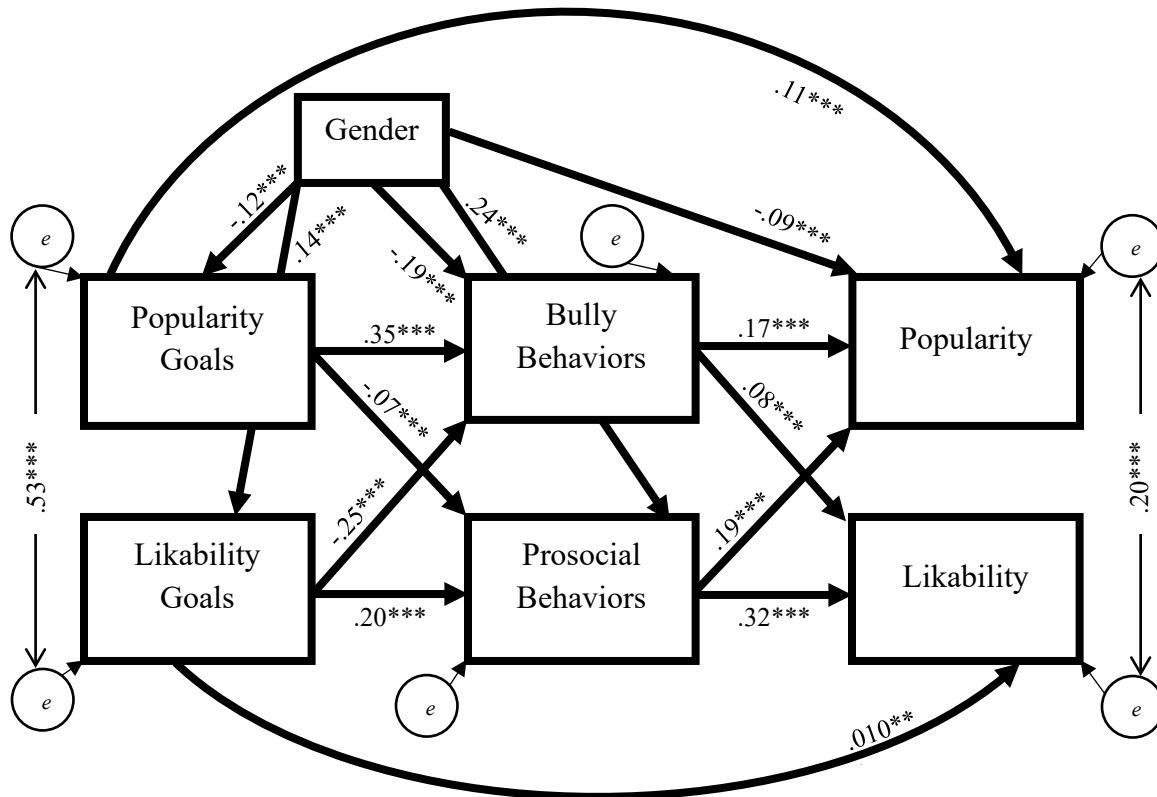
	<i>F</i>	<i>d</i>	Males		Females	
			<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Popularity goals	95.13***	.25	2.58	.88	2.37	.83
Likability goals	116.82***	.28	3.67	.87	3.90	.76
Bullying behavior	459.92***	.55	1.63	.67	1.32	.43
Prosocial behavior	542.66***	.06	.25	.77	.31	1.10
Popularity	79.55***	.23	.12	1.07	-.10	.87
Likability	.01	.01	.04	1.66	.03	1.56

Note. For all ANOVA tests, degrees of freedom were (1, 6244).

*** $p < .001$

Figure 1

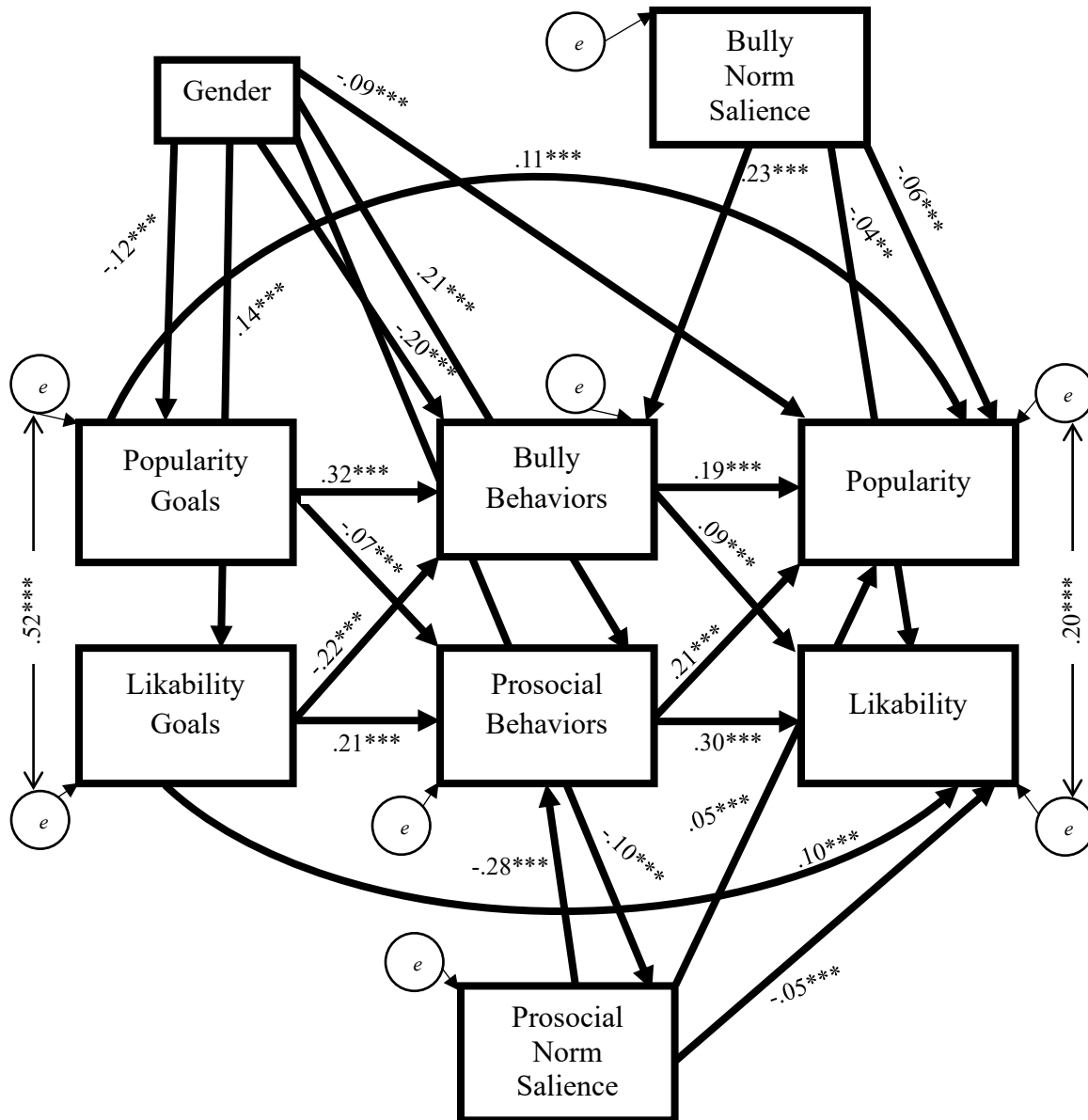
Popularity goals, bullying/prosocial behaviors, and popularity



Note. *** $p < .001$

Figure 2

Popularity goals, bullying/prosocial behaviors, and popularity



Note. Bold lines indicate significant paths.

** $p < .001$, *** $p < .001$

Figure 3

Popularity goals, bullying/prosocial behaviors, and popularity: Behavior x norm salience

