

Basking in Reflected Glory and Its Limits: Why Adolescents Hang Out With Popular Peers

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The goal of this study was to examine whether popularity and likability were related to associating with popular peers in adolescence. Participants were 3,312 adolescents (M age = 13.60 years) from 172 classrooms in 32 schools. Four types of peer affiliations of the participants with the popular peers in their classrooms were distinguished: “best friends,” “respected,” “wannabes,” and “unrelated.” Two types of benefits of affiliating with high-status peers were identified: achieving high status or popularity for oneself and becoming liked by others. The results showed that popularity was associated with being closely affiliated with popular peers, whereas likability was more strongly predicted by a more distant relation with popular peers.

Popularity is a major concern in the lives of adolescents. Who is popular and who is not are prominent questions that are of key importance especially in early adolescence (LaFontana & Cillessen, 2009). Consequently, peer relations and groups are to a large extent defined along the dimension of

popularity (Adler & Adler, 1995, 1998; Brown, 1990; Brown, Mory, & Kinney, 1994; Eder, 1985). Nevertheless, status is by definition relative to the other members of the peer group and, therefore, reserved for only a few group members (Bateson, 1958; Hirsch, 1976). The key asset of popular adolescents is that they have the power to attract peers—they are appealing to others who want to associate with them (Adler & Adler, 1998; Eder, 1985; Merten, 1997; Parkhurst & Hopmeyer, 1998). Brown et al. (1994) identified “desirability” as an important mechanism steering the dynamics of adolescent peer relations (see also Coleman, 1961; Eckert, 1989). However, the reasons behind this attraction are not so clear. Why exactly are popular adolescents attractive for affiliation, and why do their peers want to hang out with them? The current study addresses these questions by focusing on the extent to which different types of affiliation of nonpopular adolescents with popular peers are associated with status and affection among peers.

Key to understanding the attractiveness of popular adolescents is the extent to which affiliation with them helps one to achieve important social goals and benefits (Lindenberg, 2001; Steverink & Lindenberg, 2006). One important benefit that is sought by adolescents is status (Cillessen & Rose, 2005; Jarvinen & Nicholls, 1996; Ojanen, Gronroos, & Salmivalli, 2005). Hanging out with popular peers has the potential to elevate one’s own status and perhaps even make one become popular oneself. This has been referred to as “basking in reflected glory” (Cialdini & Richardson, 1980). This may explain the “desirability” of affiliating with popular peers (Brown et al., 1994).

Another important benefit sought by adolescents is affection, that is, being liked (Bukowski & Cillessen, 1998; Coie, Coppotelli, & Dodge, 1982; Gifford-Smith & Brownell, 2003; Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 2006). The “reflected glory” effect should hold for positive evaluations, and thus not just for status but also for being liked. In other words, affiliating with popular adolescents also contributes to gaining affection from others. Yet, maintaining status and affection at the same time will be difficult when the display of status involves the expression of superiority. This raises the question of whether these two distinct benefits of associating with popular peers can be realized at the same time. Popular adolescents themselves are often not the most well-liked persons in their classroom. Ethnographic studies have shown that popular adolescents are often the targets of resentment and hostility from other peers, who dislike them and accuse them of snobbism and arrogance (Adler & Alder, 1998; Eder, 1985; Merten, 1997). Because of this, being closely affiliated with the popular clique may actually reduce the likability bonus of reflected glory in the peer group at large. If this is true, pursuing status by *close* affiliation with popular peers may actually imply a loss of affection (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The current study examined the idea that affiliation with popular peers contributes to status and affection, but that close ties with popular peers come at the expense of less affection.

The positive and negative effects of affiliating with popular peers are expected to vary depending on adolescents' closeness to these peers and the nature of their association. In this regard, we distinguished a hierarchy of affiliations that adolescents may have with the popular peers in their school. Four types of affiliation were considered: "best friend," "respected peer," "wannabe," and "unrelated." The "best friend" category applies when an adolescent and a popular peer have a reciprocal best friendship. The "respected" category applies when there is a relationship of mutual liking between an adolescent and a popular peer, but not necessarily friendship. The "wannabe" category refers to an asymmetrical relationship where an adolescent sees a popular peer as a friend, but the popular peer ignores or dislikes the adolescent. The "unrelated" category applies when there is no specific relationship between an adolescent and a popular peer. Brown and Lohr (1987) had pioneered such an analysis by distinguishing different types of inclusion (see also Brown et al., 1994).

On the basis of the reflected glory effect, we hypothesized that the more closely adolescents are affiliated with popular peers, the higher their own popularity. Thus, we expected a linear increase of status benefits as a function of affiliation type (Hypothesis 1). We also expected that affiliation with popular peers would predict an adolescent's greater likability. However, for the reasons given above, we expected that very close affiliation with popular peers would be associated with less likability than being associated with them more distantly. This amounts to a curvilinear relationship between closeness and affection benefits. Thus we expected that adolescents who were somewhat more distant from popular peers (i.e., the "respected" category) would be better liked in the peer group at large than adolescents who were very closely affiliated with the popular peers (i.e., the "best friend" category). "Wannabe" and "unrelated" adolescents who in no way bask in the reflected glory of the popular peers were expected to be lower on likability than the "respected" adolescents and even lower than the "best friend" category (Hypothesis 2).

To determine the unique impact of these four types of affiliations on early adolescents' status in the peer group, the analyses controlled for the effect of four other characteristics that are valued in the peer group and have their own effects on status. These control variables were substance use, aggression, athleticism, and physical attractiveness, which are known to be positively related to peer group status on their own (e.g., Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004; Cillessen & Rose, 2005; Dijkstra, Lindenberg, Verhulst, Ormel, & Veenstra, 2009; Lease Kennedy, & Axelrod, 2002; Rodkin, Farmer, Pearl, & van Acker, 2000). Thus, we examined the effects of the four relationship types, unconfounded by four other characteristics that also predict adolescents' status in the peer group. Analyses were conducted for affiliations of nonpopular adolescents with popular boys and popular girls separately.

METHOD

Participants and Procedure

This study used a subsample from a larger cohort study, TRAILS (TRacking Adolescents' Individual Lives Survey, de Winter et al., 2005; Huisman et al., 2008). Peer nominations were collected from TRAILS participants and their classmates in classes with at least three TRAILS participants (see also Dijkstra et al., 2009). In the Netherlands, the classroom, not the school, is the main focus for the realization of status and affection (Kassenberg, 2003). Schools provided the names of the classmates. All eligible students then received an information letter for themselves and their parents, in which they were asked to participate. If students or their parents wished to refrain from participation, they were requested to send a reply card within 10 days. In total, 98 students, of whom 3 were TRAILS participants, refused to participate. Approximately 2 weeks after the information letter was sent, a TRAILS staff member visited the selected school classes to collect the peer nomination data. The sociometric data collection lasted about 15 minutes and took place during regular classroom sessions. Because in the first and second grade of Dutch secondary schools adolescents spend most of their time in the same school class, peer nominations were collected within classrooms.

Peer nominations were assessed in 172 classes in 34 schools in first grade (72 classrooms) and second grade (100 classrooms) of secondary education. The classrooms were evenly divided by educational track: low (60 classrooms), middle (53 classrooms), and high (59 classrooms). Of all 3,672 adolescents who were approached to participate, 90.2% completed the peer nomination measure. This yielded a total of 3,312 students (1,675 boys, 1,637 girls), including 1,007 regular TRAILS participants (M age = 13.60, SD = 0.66). Each classroom contained on average 18.39 participants (SD = 5.99; range 7–30). The ethnic composition of the subsample was 87.3% Caucasian, 0.5% Turkish, 0.6% Moroccan, 1.7% Surinamese, 1.2% Antillian/Aruban, 2.5% Indonesian, 4.1% other, and 2% unknown. All measures for the present study were based on peer nominations from this subsample. Students could name an unlimited number of same-sex and other-sex classmates in their responses to all questions.

Measures

Popularity. Popularity was based on the number of nominations adolescents received from their classmates for the question "Who do others want to be associated with?" The concept of popularity covers influence, dominance, power, attractiveness, and resource control (de Bruyn & Cillessen, 2006; LaFontana & Cillessen, 2002; Lease, Musgrove, & Axelrod, 2002; Parkhurst & Hopmeyer, 1998). Central is the idea that the popular

person is attractive to many others, who want to hang out and associate with them to bask in their reflected glory (Cialdini & Richardson, 1980). Personal preference for a peer should be distinguished from the reputation of a peer as someone everybody wants to hang out with. Therefore, we did not ask adolescents who they personally liked, but who they thought others in general wanted to associate with. This yields a reputation-based measure of affiliative popularity. We refer to this measure simply as "popularity."

Our measure of popularity correlated modestly ($r_s = .15, .24, .27, .19$; $p_s < .001$) with social preference (i.e., liked minus disliked nominations from peers), social impact, (i.e., liked plus disliked nominations from peers), best friend nominations, and liked most nominations. None of these correlations exceeded the criterion for convergent validity, demonstrating sufficient discriminant validity of the popularity measure from other dimensions of peer status.

The number of nominations received was counted for each student and divided by the number of respondents in the classroom. The resulting scores indicated the proportion of nominators that saw each adolescent as popular. These proportions were then standardized in the entire sample (across classrooms) to a mean of 0 and standard deviation of 1. Adolescents who scored more than 1 *SD* above the mean were considered popular. This yielded 447 popular peers (13.5% of the total sample; 232 boys, 215 girls). There was no association between the popularity classification and gender, $\chi^2(1, N = 3,312) = .37, p = .58$. The number of popular peers in each classroom ranged from 0 to 12 ($M = 2.60, SD = 2.25$). There were 31 classrooms in which no one met the criterion for popularity. These classrooms were excluded from the analyses. This resulted in a sample with 2,864 nonpopular adolescents (1,442 boys, 1,422 girls) and 447 popular adolescents.

Affiliative relations. After identifying the popular adolescents, three other peer nominations for best friend (Who are your best friends?), liked (Who do you like?), and disliked (Who do you not like at all?) were used to assess the affiliations of adolescents with the popular peers in their classroom. This implies that each adolescent could in principle be related to different popular peers. Because we were interested in the effect of different affiliations of nonpopular adolescents with their popular peers, affiliation of popular adolescents with other popular peers were excluded from the analyses. In the "best friend" affiliation, an adolescent named at least one popular peer as best friend and the popular peer reciprocated the best friend choice. In the "respected" affiliation, an adolescent named a popular peer as best friend or liked, and the popular peer named the adolescent as liked but not as best friend. In the "wannabe" affiliation, an adolescent named a popular peer as best friend or liked, but the popular peer did not nominate the adolescent as best friend or liked, or even nominated the adolescent as disliked. In the "unrelated" affiliation, the adolescent did not name any of the

popular peers in the classroom on any of the three criteria, and none of the popular peers named the adolescent on any of the three criteria (i.e., best friend, liked, or disliked). Because participants were free to name both same-sex and other-sex peers, we were able to disentangle affiliations of male and female adolescents with popular boys and popular girls.

A total of 2,497 relations was identified of adolescent boys (1,337) and girls (1,160) with popular males and 2,583 of adolescent boys (1,262) and girls (1,321) with popular females (see Table 1). Most best friend relations were with same-gender popular peers, whereas the "unrelated" affiliations were most common across gender. We did not find large differences for respected adolescents in the number of same-gender and cross-gender affiliations. For the number of "wannabe" affiliations, no large differences appeared for popular girls between same-gender and cross-gender adolescents. For popular boys, however, the number of wannabe affiliations was substantively lower for same-gender than for cross-gender peers.

Nonpopular peers can have different relations with popular adolescents. To give insight in the heterogeneity of the relations of nonpopular adolescents with popular peers we calculated to what extent variability occurred in the type of relations nonpopular adolescents have with popular peers. The average number of affiliations nonpopular adolescents had with popular boys was 2.26 ($SD = 1.22$) and with popular girls 2.46 ($SD = 1.35$). From the total number of adolescents who were affiliated with a popular boy or girl, about three quarters had only a single relation with a popular boy or girl or had multiple relations of the same type (e.g., two wannabe relations with popular classmates). The most extreme form of multiple relations (being best friends with one popular boy or girl and being unrelated to an other popular boy or girl) occurred for <1% of the nonpopular peers.

TABLE 1
Frequency and Percentage of Affiliative Relationships of Boys and Girls With Male and Female Popular Peers

Adolescents	Popular Peer	Type of Affiliation With Popular Peers				Total Affiliations	
		Best Friend	Respected	Wannabe	Unrelated		
Boys (<i>N</i> = 1,442)	Male (<i>N</i> = 232)	<i>f</i>	373	487	284	193	1,337
		%	27.9	36.4	21.2	14.4	100
	Female (<i>N</i> = 215)	<i>f</i>	55	474	428	305	1,262
		%	4.4	37.6	33.9	24.2	100
Girls (<i>N</i> = 1,422)	Male (<i>N</i> = 232)	<i>f</i>	59	494	325	282	1,160
		%	5.1	42.6	28.0	24.3	100
	Female (<i>N</i> = 215)	<i>f</i>	269	539	346	167	1,321
		%	20.4	40.8	26.2	12.6	100

Popularity and likability as outcome variables. Both sociometric indicators were assessed with the peer nominations “Who do others want to be associated with?” and “Who do you like?” The number of nominations received for each question was counted for each student and divided by the number of nominators. The resulting scores indicate the proportion of voters that named each student as popular or liked. These proportion scores were standardized in the total sample to a mean of 0 and standard deviation of 1. For the calculation of both the likability score and the popularity score, we excluded the nominations as given by popular adolescents to their peers to avoid overlap between independent and dependent variables.

Behavioral characteristics. Peer nominations were also used to assess the four peer-valued characteristics that serve as control variables: substance use (Who takes alcohol or drugs on a regular basis?), aggression (Who starts fights?), athleticism (Who is good in sports?), and physical attractiveness (Who is good looking?). As for the other peer nominations, nominations received were counted, transformed to proportion scores within classrooms, and then transformed to z-scores in the entire sample.

RESULTS

Comparison of Means

To examine whether affiliations with popular peers were differently associated with popularity and likability, we first compared mean scores using analyses of variance (see Table 2). Here, we explicitly disentangled relations

TABLE 2
Average Popularity and Likability of Boys and Girls in Each Type of Affiliation With Male and Female Popular Peers

Adolescent	Popular Peer	Outcome Variables	Type of Affiliation With Popular Peers			
			Best Friend	Respected	Wannabe	Unrelated
Boys (N = 1,442)	Male (N = 232)	Popularity	.15	-.13	-.26	-.43
		Likability	.20 _a	.24 _a	-.45 _b	-.36 _b
	Female (N = 215)	Popularity	.40	.02	-.19	-.33
		Likability	.52 _a	.46 _a	-.06 _b	-.13 _b
Girls (N = 1,422)	Male (N = 232)	Popularity	.42	.08	-.19	-.45
		Likability	.38 _a	.49 _a	-.29 _b	-.30 _b
	Female (N = 215)	Popularity	.23	-.09	-.36 _a	-.47 _a
		Likability	.29 _a	.30 _a	-.29 _b	-.41 _b

Note. Means in the same row that do not share a subscript were significantly different in a post hoc comparison test. The numbers for each column of affiliation type correspond with those presented in Table 1.

of adolescent boys and girls with popular males and females. To avoid capitalization on chance due to multiple comparisons, we used a Bonferroni correction in which the initial significance level of $p < .05$ was divided by the number of groups compared. Therefore, the significance level was $p < .0125$.

As can be seen in Table 2, the overall pattern was almost similar for affiliations of adolescents of both sexes with popular boys and girls. Adolescents' popularity increased linearly as a function of their own closeness of affiliation with popular peers. For likability, we found that "wannabe" and "unrelated" adolescents scored significantly lower than adolescents in a "best friend" or "respected" affiliation. No difference was found in likability for adolescents who were best friends with a popular boy and adolescents in a respected relationship with a popular boy.

Multilevel Regression Analyses

To further examine the data, multilevel regression analyses were conducted to account for the nesting of adolescents (Level 1) in classrooms (Level 2; Snijders & Bosker, 1999). Using multilevel analyses allowed us to control for unobserved differences between classes and obtain more conservative estimates of effects by using unbiased standard errors and avoiding overestimating the effects of variables at the individual level. In addition to the individual-level predictors (gender and the four control variables, substance use, aggression, athleticism, and physical attractiveness) and the dependent variables (popularity and likability), we also included the proportion of popular adolescents at the class level in the analysis. This allowed us to account for differences between classrooms in the number of popular peers, which affects the possibility of adolescents affiliating with these peers. The analyses were conducted to examine the extent to which each of the four affiliation types predicted popularity and likability.

Analyses were run separately for affiliations of adolescents with male popular peers (Table 3) and with female popular peers (Table 4). For each of these two cases, one analysis was run to predict popularity and one to predict likability. Thus, a total of four multilevel regressions were run. Each regression included two steps. In Step 1, gender was entered, the main effects of substance use, aggression, athleticism, and physical attractiveness, and the interaction of each of these four with gender. Substance use was positively related to popularity, but not to likability. Aggression was positively associated with popularity, but negatively with likability. Athleticism and physical attractiveness were positively related to both popularity and likability.

In Step 2, the four affiliation types were entered as dummy-coded contrasts. To assess the unique contribution of each compared with the previous, the affiliations were coded as ordered dummy variables in the following sequence: unrelated, wannabes, respected, and best friends. In this method of adjacent contrasts, each group is compared with the previous group. This

TABLE 3
Results From Multilevel Regressions Predicting Adolescents' Popularity and Likability From Affiliations With Popular Boys

	<i>Popularity</i>				<i>Likability</i>			
	<i>Model 1</i>		<i>Model 2</i>		<i>Model 1</i>		<i>Model 2</i>	
	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>
Step 1: Peer characteristics								
Gender (1 = boy)	.05	1.70	-0.02	0.55	.18	4.28**	.14	3.04**
Substance use	.06	2.64**	0.05	2.45**	.02	0.47	.01	0.19
Aggression	.17	4.31**	0.16	3.97**	-.28	4.98**	-.27	4.91**
Athleticism	.09	4.05**	0.08	3.57**	.13	4.29**	.12	3.93**
Physical attractiveness	.26	16.13**	0.23	13.71**	.36	15.52**	.32	13.33**
Gender × Substance Use	.02	0.89	0.02	0.70	.06	1.63	.07	1.71
Gender × Aggression	-.07	1.64	-0.06	1.43	.04	0.58	.03	0.58
Gender × Athleticism	.05	1.77	0.02	0.92	.06	1.54	.05	1.39
Gender × Physical Attractiveness	.01	0.27	0.01	0.28	.02	0.43	.04	1.00
Step 2: Type of affiliation								
Wannabe			0.07	2.48**			-.17	4.22**
Respected			0.07	2.77**			.32	8.70**
Best friend			0.17	5.80**			-.09	2.07*
Proportion popular boys			1.02	2.61**			-.36	0.61
Explained variance	14.7%		19.0%		19.5%		21.8%	
Deviance	3,846		3,765		5,684		5,609	
Decrease in deviance	632 (<i>df</i> = 9)**		81 (<i>df</i> = 4)**		675 (<i>df</i> = 9)**		75 (<i>df</i> = 4)**	

Note. Decrease in deviance indicates whether or not the model fits the data better than the former model. The decrease in deviance has approximately a chi-square distribution with the degrees of freedom equal to the difference in the number of parameters of the models.

p* < .05; *p* < .01.

implies that the regression coefficient of each affiliation type should be added to the regression coefficients of the previous category (Kalmijn, 1999). Because the unrelated category was the first one in the sequence, it served as the reference category. The first contrast in the analysis then indicates the effect of having a wannabe affiliation versus being unrelated, the second contrast indicates the effect of being respected versus having a wannabe affiliation, and the third contrast indicates the effect of being best friends versus being respected.

Step 2 also included the number of popular peers in each class and its interaction with gender to control for differences between classes in the number of popular peers. Classes in which none of the boys (28 school classes) or girls (42 school classes) met our criterion of being popular were excluded from the corresponding analyses, that is, analyses for affiliations

TABLE 4
Results From Multilevel Regressions Predicting Adolescents' Popularity and Likability From Affiliations With Popular Girls

	<i>Popularity</i>				<i>Likability</i>			
	<i>Model 1</i>		<i>Model 2</i>		<i>Model 1</i>		<i>Model 2</i>	
	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>
Step 1: Peer characteristics								
Gender (1 = boy)	.10	3.30**	0.09	2.02*	.31	7.33**	.42	6.63**
Substance use	.09	4.27**	0.08	3.71**	-.05	1.50	-.05	1.77
Aggression	.07	2.00*	0.06	1.70	-.32	6.98**	-.32	7.04**
Athleticism	.09	4.19**	0.06	2.75**	.15	5.10**	.13	4.61**
Physical attractiveness	.21	11.78**	0.16	8.94**	.40	16.54**	.36	14.36**
Gender × Substance Use	-.00	0.15	0.00	0.08	.13	3.57**	.12	3.33**
Gender × Aggression	.01	0.14	0.02	0.53	.14	2.69**	.15	3.02**
Gender × Athleticism	.01	0.46	0.03	1.32	.04	1.11	.05	1.46
Gender × Physical Attractiveness	.10	3.06**	0.11	0.09	.02	0.39	-.01	0.13
Step 2: Type of affiliation								
Wannabe			0.08	2.55**			-.22	5.42**
Respected			0.11	4.07**			.37	9.76**
Best friend			0.25	7.64**			-.10	2.11*
Proportion popular girls			2.04	4.42**			.33	0.49
Gender × Proportion popular Girls			0.51	2.01*			-.98	2.80*
Explained variance	15.8%		27.8%		24.9%		26.1%	
Deviance	3,724		3,577		5,310		5,209	
Decrease in deviance	525 (<i>df</i> = 9)**		147 (<i>df</i> = 5)**		778 (<i>df</i> = 9)**		101 (<i>df</i> = 5)**	

Note. Decrease in deviance indicates whether or not the model fits the data better than the former model. The decrease in deviance has approximately a chi-square distribution with the degrees of freedom equal to the difference in the number of parameters of the models.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

with male and female popular peers, respectively. In Tables 3 and 4, the results of the regression analyses are presented for adolescents' affiliations with male and female popular peers, respectively.

In support of Hypothesis 1, popularity increased linearly as a function of affiliation type. The closer adolescents were affiliated with popular peers, the higher their own level of popularity. Thus, being best friends with popular boys or popular girls was most predictive for one's own popularity. No significant gender interactions were found.

In line with Hypothesis 2, we found that being respected by a popular peer contributes more to likability than being best friends with a popular peer. For

respected peers, we found a positive effect of affiliations with popular boys and girls on likability, while for best friends the effect was negative. Likability was lower for adolescents who were "best friends" with popular peers than for "respected" adolescents. Furthermore, there was a negative effect for "wannabes," meaning that their likability was lower compared with adolescents who are "unrelated" to popular peers. Again, no significant interactions with gender were found.

The explained variance increased by adding each type of affiliation to the model in Step 2, particularly for popularity. Effect sizes for the different types of affiliation are small (i.e., between .02 and .05), except for the prediction of popularity from affiliations with popular girls, which was medium (i.e., .17; Cohen, 1988). However, to see whether or not the second model fit the data better than the first model, we calculated the decrease in deviance. This decrease has approximately a chi-square distribution, with degrees of freedom equal to the difference in the parameters of the two models. A significant decrease in deviance indicates a significant improvement of the model. As can be seen in Tables 3 and 4, for both popularity and likability the fit of the second model was better than that the fit of the first model.

DISCUSSION

Peer status is a major concern for adolescents, but only a few adolescents can be popular. One of the most prominent assets of popular peers is that others would like to be associated with them. Why is this so? What do they get from this association? To explain the attractiveness of popular peers for affiliation, we focused on two important goals for the adolescents who are affiliated with them: status (popularity) and affection (likability). We reasoned that being associated with popular adolescents is related to higher levels of popularity and likability, which suggests that peers can bask in reflected glory (Cialdini & Richardson, 1980). They can enhance both their own popularity and their likability by being associated with popular peers. Being closely affiliated with popular peers may be good for one's status, but may also negatively relate to one's likability because popular peers are often snobbish and aggressive toward others and thus create an ambivalent attitude (Adler & Adler, 1998; Eder, 1985; Merten, 1997). To study these effects, we distinguished four types of affiliation between adolescents and their popular peers, representing a hierarchy, that is, "best friends," "respected," "wannabes," and "unrelated."

In line with our first hypothesis, status increased the closer adolescents affiliated with popular peers. This suggests that adolescents indeed can bask in reflected glory, that is, enhance their own status through affiliation with popular peers. Because we controlled for several characteristics that predict popularity, such as aggression and physical attractiveness, and removed affiliations among popular adolescents from the analyses, the higher level of

popularity when nonpopular adolescents are more closely affiliated with popular peers is likely to be solely due to their type of affiliation with popular peers.

For likability, we found indeed that “respected” peers, being more distant to the popular peers, were highest. Also as expected, “best friends” of popular peers were still higher than “wannabes” and “unrelated” adolescents who cannot bask in reflected glory. These relations were similar for both sexes.

There are interesting aspects of cross-gender affiliations. In the current analyses, relations among popular adolescents were excluded from the analyses. This reduced the number of best friends affiliations for popular peers with same-gender peers with 50%, and for cross-gender affiliations this percentage was even 60%. Repeating the analyses with the inclusion of relations between popular adolescents revealed that being best friends with popular peers was most strongly associated with popularity of an adolescent of the other sex. Boys who were best friends with popular girls, and vice versa, scored the highest levels of popularity. These findings seem to reflect that popular adolescents are at the forefront in their peer group with respect to crossing gender boundaries (Dunphy, 1990).

A possibility is that these cross-gender best friendships might actually be romantic relationships. Research has shown that adolescent romantic relationships are especially sensitive to popularity and status (Brown, 1999; Connolly & Goldberg, 1999). Indeed, Dijkstra, Cillessen, Veenstra, and Lindenberg (2010) found that popularity was conducive to cross-gender likability, whereas it was unrelated to same-gender likability. One aspect of popularity that strongly facilitates crossing gender boundaries in adolescence is the visibility of popular adolescents in the larger peer group. This in combination with athletic abilities and physical attractiveness highly increases sexual attractiveness. In turn, engagement in such relationships is also likely to enhance status. If true, these high status adolescents continue to increase in status and also in being preferred as a friend (cf. Barabási, 2002). Future research should shed more light on these processes in adolescent peer groups.

This study demonstrates that different kinds of affiliation with popular peers are related to differences in both status and affection. It also shows that coming very close to popular peers has a strong relation with status but is associated with lower affection than for a more distant affiliation. This seems to suggest that those who go all out for the status by trying to be closest friend of a popular peer pay for it with lowered affection from other peers. Eder (1985), in her ethnographic study on girls’ popularity, described similar processes of entrance and expulsion in the popular crowd and the ways in which becoming member of the popular crowd affects someone’s likability. Her study showed how new members of the popular crowd found it impossible or unwise to retain old ties with peers outside the popular clique. As

a consequence, membership of the popular crowd negatively affected the position of adolescents within the larger peer group and led peers to characterize popular adolescents as snobbish and arrogant (see also de Bruyn & Cillessen, 2006; Gorman, Kim, & Schimmelbusch, 2002; Lease et al., 2002). In the long run, this may have negative consequences for well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Future research will have to examine the long-term effects for those who prioritize status at the expense of affection.

For those who are unable to establish any positive relation with the popular peers (the "wannabe" and "unrelated" types), the situation is less positive because they do not bask in reflected glory, neither for status nor for affection. This is especially true for the wannabes, who scored even lower on likability than unrelated adolescents. This may be explained by the so-called by-product paradox (Lindenberg, 1989; Sheldon, 2004). When people explicitly seek affection and seem needy in this regard, they are less likely to get it. Affection is best achieved if one seeks it implicitly as a by-product of other features or behavior, yet "wannabes" are likely to explicitly seek affection from popular peers. This explanation is also supported by Adler and Adler (1998), who point to the possibility that the strategic behavior of the popular peers may also contribute to a reduced likability of the wannabes. They described this group of adolescents who eagerly sought affiliation with popular adolescents as one that allowed themselves to be made a stooge by the popular crowd, thereby reducing their likability.

Overall, the relation of wannabes with popular peers reflects the three mechanisms as distinguished by Brown et al. (1994) that guide peer interactions within and between peer crowds, namely, desirability, proximity, and permeability. For the wannabes, the desire to affiliate with popular peers is not reciprocated, nor is it reflected in higher proximity and access (permeability) to the popular kids in the peer group.

Several questions that remain open concern the development of relations of wannabes with the popular crowd over time. Specifically, it will be interesting to examine whether wannabes have been members of the popular crowd and have been pushed out or whether they are on their way to ultimately becoming affiliated with the popular peers (see also Adler & Alder, 1995). Because of the cross-sectional nature of our data, these questions could not be addressed in the current study.

Furthermore, longitudinal research is also necessary to address the shift in importance (salience) adolescents attach to being liked within the larger peer group in favor of their reputation within a particular crowd (Eckert, 1989). Brown and Lohr (1987) found that the importance of being part of a peer crowd varied in accordance with the status of the peer group, that is, the higher the status of a peer crowd, the more importance members attached to status. This salience of status may even sideline to some degree the importance of being liked within the larger peer group, so that the search for affection may fade over time relative to the search for status within a

particular crowd. This may have serious consequences for those who have been pushed out of the popular group. Because of their earlier snobbism (giving status higher salience than affection), they may find it difficult to affiliate with others from the larger group. There is a real chance that this happens, given that the membership of a popular crowd seems to fluctuate more than friendships among adolescents who are somewhat lower in status (cf. "middle friendships"; Adler & Adler, 1998).

In line with this, it is interesting to examine to what extent these processes affect the social development of adolescents. Is it the case that adolescents for whom status is particularly important but who fail to become part of the popular crowd face more internalizing problems and/or externalizing problems? It may be that these adolescents, in order to increase their chances of membership of a popular crowd, imitate behaviors of popular peers that can easily be copied, such as aggressiveness or bullying. However, popular adolescents also have prosocial, positive characteristics that enable them to mitigate the negative effect of such behaviors on peer relations (see Dijkstra et al., 2009). Lacking such features might ultimately lead to a decrease in likability among peers as well as a decrease in the chance of becoming a member of a popular crowd. These questions necessitate longitudinal research designs.

A limitation of the current study is that, due to the cross-sectional nature of our data, statements about causality are unwarranted, even though the mechanism we specified for deriving our hypotheses is clearly causal. There are solid hints for the causal links. For example, we found that the type of affiliation with popular peers was significant, even after excluding relations with other popular peers and controlling for four important features that are known to contribute to popularity and likability. Still, the suggested causal order might be also in the other direction. For example, adolescents who are somewhat popular might be more likely to become best friends with even more popular peers. Moreover, attributes that were not taken into account in our analyses could also affect adolescents' popularity and likability. This may explain why, although the variance explained increased substantively after adding the different types of affiliations to the model, particularly for affiliations with popular girls, effect sizes for the different types of affiliation were small to medium (Cohen, 1988).

Our study focused on adolescents within a rather small age range. To what extent our findings could be generalized to other age groups remains open for future research. Furthermore, there could be other variables at both the individual and classroom levels that were not considered but might influence the observed effects. Still, we controlled for several characteristics at the individual level and for the number of popular peers at the classroom level. More research should shed light on the extent to which different types of affiliation help or hinder realization of someone's goals, such as status and affection.

Our study has several strengths. First, we found that being closely affiliated with popular peers is not only positively associated with one's status (basking in reflected glory), but also that friendship relations with popular peers are linked to lower levels of liking in the larger peer group. Second, the findings from this study, conducted in the Netherlands, showed that similar processes of peer relations could be identified outside of the North American context.

One difference with other studies is our measure of popularity. Contrary to studies that ask for the most (and sometimes least) popular peers in the classroom, we asked adolescents to identify those peers with whom others want to be associated. The wording of this question explicitly refers to the attractiveness of a peer for affiliation and it is particularly suited for reflected glory aspects of status. Because we did not ask for personal preference, we think that this measure captures a reputation-based aspect of popularity, namely, the ability to attract peers. Although the disadvantage of this measure is that it is somewhat different from other studies, the modest correlations with other measures of social preference and likability, which are comparable to other studies (Cillessen & Rose, 2005), strengthen the idea that our popularity measure tapped a distinct aspect of peer relations.

In conclusion, this study demonstrated why popular peers are attractive for affiliation. Status (popularity) and affection (likability) are important goals, also for adolescents and both are associated with being affiliated to popular peers. For the realization of both goals, one can try to bask in the reflected glory of these peers. However, this study clearly showed a limit of "basking in reflected glory" with regard to likability for adolescents who are too closely affiliated with popular peers. There seems to be a trade-off. Very close affiliation with popular peers is related to status, but also to lowered affection. More distant affiliation predicts affection but also lowered status.

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