RECOLLECTIONS OF HIGH SCHOOL: WHAT MAKES A GIRL POPULAR?

By

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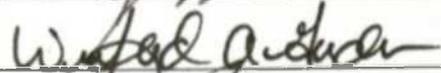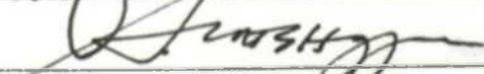
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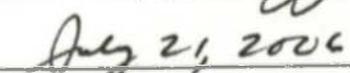
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A thesis presented to the faculty of the Graduate School of Western Carolina University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Abstract

RECOLLECTIONS OF HIGH SCHOOL: WHAT MAKES A GIRL POPULAR?

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The purpose of this study was to investigate male and female perceptions

of variables related to popularity in females. In this study, 120 college female and

male freshmen were given a questionnaire asking them to rate highly popular,

moderately popular and least popular peers from their high schools. From this

data, characteristics of popularity and attitudes towards the three peers assessed

were compared. It was hypothesized that those females who were perceived as

being popular would also be seen as being more aggressive, more prosocial, more

socially exclusive, and less able to cope with teasing than less popular children.

Based on the literature (Adler & Adler, 1998) the factors hypothesized to be most

important are socioeconomic status, social development, academic performance,

and physical appearance. Lastly, a positive correlation between popularity of first

names and perceived peer popularity was hypothesized.

Introduction

Do you remember who your friends were in high school? Whom did you walk to school with? Whom did you sit next to during lunch? Whose team were you a part of in gym class? Who decided your social status at school? Did these interactions mean anything to you? Did they play a part in determining who you are today? In studying these questions we must answer one fundamental question: What does it mean to be popular?

For the past two decades, developmental psychologists have struggled to answer this question. To answer it, they have used various methods to collect data and have came up with a few preliminary conclusions. This literature review included studies and conclusions concerning female popularity. Topics discussed included: definition of popularity in regards to females, types of popularity, factors that are related to popularity, the social order of females, and preservation of popularity. It is important to note that there has been little research using post-high school participants.

Literature Review

Popularity is defined as being liked or accepted by the greatest number of people. For girls, the quest to be popular begins as soon as they enter the school setting (Adler & Adler, 1998). Schools are an environment where children's social order is determined by their interactions with other students. The child's place in this social order is also influenced by her own perceptions of her social status. This idea of individual social status and where a child falls in the social order is related to a child's psychological wellbeing.

Measures of Popularity

Sociometric Popularity. Sociometric popularity is determined by asking children to name peers that they like and dislike. Then these target peers are placed into categories based on the number of votes received. This type of methodology can be used to describe popular and unpopular children, peer relations, interactions and activities. Sociometric status is not related to psychological well being or personality development. Modern sociometric measures have been used to place children into five categories: well liked by everyone (popular), children who are not mentioned (neglected), children who are liked by some and not others (controversial), children who are generally liked and rarely disliked (average), and children who are disliked (rejected) (Cadwallader, 2000).

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If a girl is sociometrically popular, her behavior will be interpreted more positively than if she is sociometrically unpopular (LaFontana & Cillessen, 1998). This is why sociometric popularity is linked to stereotypes children form about their peers. LaFontana and Cillessen interviewed 135 males and females who ranged in age from 9 to 11. Participants were told that new students might be transferring to their class. Participants were then presented with three pictures of the transferees and told that one was popular, one was unpopular, and nothing was told about the other. Various positive and negative behaviors were attributed to each picture. Participants were then asked questions about each picture. It was found that children who were judged sociometrically popular were considered kind and trustworthy and were held less responsible for negative behavior, while sociometrically unpopular children were thought to be more antisocial, hostile, and more responsible for negative behaviors. This stereotype might be why adults see popular children as being more socially mature, caring, and able to adapt well to novel situations. In another study by LaFontana and Cillessen (2002), 405 fourth through eighth grade students (49% female) completed a 10 question sociometric questionnaire. Questions consisted of nominating popular, unpopular, liked, and disliked peers and then nominating peers who fit a certain trait (e.g. athletic, prosocial). It was found that unpopular children are often viewed as socially inept, unsympathetic to peers, and having poor coping mechanisms.

Perceived Popularity and Related Variables. Perceived popularity is assessed by asking children to name directly who they think is popular and unpopular, rather than whom they like or dislike. This construct is related to reputation rather than personal

preference. LaFontana and Cillessen (2002) found that children who are most often perceived as popular were sociometrically controversial, rather than sociometrically popular. It was also found that perceived popularity is associated with social power. Perceived popular children were seen as dominant, aggressive, and arrogant. From these studies, prosocial behavior was associated with sociometric popularity, while aggressive and disruptive behaviors were associated with perceived popularity. Richmond, Beatty, and Dylan (1988) found that perceived unpopularity was associated with shyness for third through twelfth-grades.

In a recent study, Nangle, Erdley, and Gold (1996) asked 90 fourth and fifth graders (33 males, 57 females) to nominate three children they liked and three children they disliked from a roster of classmates. The children were then asked five questions about specific behavior characteristics of each nominated peer. The five questions related to cooperation, disruption, shyness, aggression and leadership. It was found that children who are liked or disliked by their peers are perceived differently. A child is perceived as being liked or disliked and a reputation develops for that child. This reputation relates to whether the child is associated with popular or unpopular groups and a social system forms. Soon a child's behaviors are interpreted in such a way that these biases are maintained. It has been found that children who are regarded as popular by peers receive more positive reinforcement and visual attention, while unpopular children receive more punishment and less visual attention.

In a study by Edler (1985), 190 females ranging from ages 11-14 to find out how they perceived cliques and popularity. It was found that girls make conscious efforts to

become popular by joining activities that seem related to popularity. After joining, a child becomes identified with that group and is considered popular. After this occurs, girls of average popularity try to bid for the popular girl's friendship to experience a raise in their own popularity. The popular girl rejects some bids of friendship and accepts others. She also avoids associating with girls perceived as being of lower popularity status. The popular girl is perceived as being arrogant to others, which may explain why resentment occurs in social groups.

Santor, Messervey and Kusumakar (2000) asked 148 adolescents (16-18 years old) to complete surveys, which rated well being, school performance, sexual attitudes and behaviors, and substance use. It was found that popular girls were more likely to engage in theft, drug use, and sexual activity than average or rejected peers. They were also more likely to be influenced by peer pressure, which has been shown to increase high-risk behaviors such as unprotected sexual activity, substance abuse, delinquency, and poor school performance.

Suitor and Carter (1999) asked college students who had graduated from high school the previous year to list five ways that high-school girls and boys could become popular. They found that good academic performance was associated with popularity, as were variables such as participating in school sports, clubs, and government. Interestingly, they also found that in addition to having a good sense of humor, being a "class clown" also was associated with popularity for girls. These researchers also reviewed the literature on gender roles, and concluded that for adolescent girls the main

ways to acquire prestige (though not necessarily popularity) are through academic performance, appearance and variables related to sociability.

Through an ethnographic study, Adler and Adler (1998) observed and interacted with hundreds of preadolescent children and found that there are four main variables related to female popularity: socioeconomic status (SES), social development, academic performance and physical attractiveness. Each factor is related to how children judge and view each other. These factors have been correlated with both perceived and sociometric popularity.

Socioeconomic Status. Socioeconomic status (SES) and parent permissiveness have been related to popularity. Girls whose parents are wealthy and let them have a lot of freedom are perceived as popular. Mertin (1997) studied 270 junior high school students (127 males, 143 females) by having a cohort attend school with the participants and observe and interview them. During interviews, adolescent girls reported that if a girl had designer clothes and her parents let her stay out late she was more popular than girls who dressed shabbily and whose parents were stricter.

Social Development. The way in which girls socially interact and relate to their social setting also affects their popularity. Adler, Kless, and Adler (1992) had cohorts (counselors, coaches, school aides) interact with and interview hundreds of elementary-school children. The researchers found that females who were more precocious and exclusive were more popular. Precocity refers to the development of adult characteristics at a young age, such as understanding group dynamics like negotiation and manipulation

of others. Exclusiveness refers to the ability to form small elite groups, which are maintained through negative behaviors like gossiping, bossiness and meanness.

Academic Performance. Findings in studies using academic performance as a variable have been inconsistent. Adler, Kless and Adler (1992) found that females who are in the same classes in high school are of the same academic potential (due to academic tracking) and these girls usually become friends. Girls in the same classes socialize and form social hierarchies in class. In each class, there are popular girls whose academic performances are similar; therefore this variable is associated with female popularity. In addition, unlike boys, girls do not look down on others who do well academically; these researchers found that girls can gain popularity through completing complex tasks and getting good grades in school. While Santor, et al. (2000) found that popular high-school students performed poorly in school, Suitor and Carter (1999) found the opposite.

Physical Attractiveness. Another factor in female popularity is physical attractiveness. When questioned about who is popular, junior-high school girls said that you have to be attractive and practice good grooming (Mertin, 1997). Physical attractiveness has been linked with social skills. Research has shown that facial attractiveness draws attention to females but adequate social skills gives them the power to influence people, which make them popular (Adams & Roopnarine, 1994).

First Name. In a study using elementary-school children (Busse & Seraydarian, 1979), girls who were rated as popular by their peers had names that were more desirable (based on previous research) than the names of less popular girls. The results of studies asking participants to rate the popularity of fictitious students given names based on previous

research on name frequencies have been inconsistent. Young, Kennedy, Newhouse, Browne, et. al. (1993) found that college students rated unknown persons with high frequency names as more popular than those with lower frequency names. However, Tompkins and Boor (1980) had student teachers rate pictures of seventh-grade boys, given names based on popularity ratings of the children (though attractive children were rated as more popular than unattractive children). Studies more typically have rated the popularity or desirability of first names, but have not found related findings to the popularity of actual or fictitious children (e.g. Busse & Helfrich, 1975; Hargreaves, Colman, & Wladyslaw, 1983).

Social Hierarchy

To understand female popularity, the social orders of schools must be examined. Girls are part of a social hierarchy, especially in the school setting. This hierarchy consists of several groups including the popular clique, the wannabes, the middle friendship circles, and the social isolates (Adler & Adler, 1998). Each group has its own composition and characteristics.

The Popular Clique. Adler and Adler (1998), studying preadolescent children, found that members of this clique have the most active social life, largest number of friends, and seem to have the most fun. This group is at the top of the hierarchy. They and their classmates know that their group is exclusive and controls its boundaries from undesirable interlopers. Only females who are deemed worthy of high social status are allowed entry into this group. To become a member of this group, a girl would have to

be sponsored by a girl who was already popular. This social group usually makes up thirty-five percent of a school grade level.

Several types of roles are filled in the popular clique. These roles are leader, second-tier members, and accepted followers. Leaders were the most forceful members of the group and the most dominating; they decided who remained in the group and who was allowed in. Second tier members are those who are best friends with the leader or have gained favor with her. This tier is composed of one to two girls and they have influence in the group and can someday become leaders if the current leader falls out of favor. Followers are the lowest rung of the popular clique but they make up the bulk of the group. Followers accept the leader's actions and give them authority over the group; they are the most likely to be kicked out of the group if they offend the leader.

To remain in the popular clique, girls (second-tier and followers) have to imitate and support the leader of the group. There is always competition to remain in this group, and often girls have to try to stay in the leader's good graces by insulting other group members and girls outside of the group. Membership in this group for all involved is uncertain and fragile due to its exclusiveness.

The Wannabes. Adler and Adler (1998) found that wannabes are followers of the popular clique. Girls in this group are sometimes invited into the popular clique for games and activities. They try to imitate popular girls by wearing the same clothing and having the same hairstyles, listening to the same music, and trying to use the same vocabulary. These girls do everything to try to fit in, but despite their best efforts, they always remain wannabes. This group makes up ten percent of the entire school grade level.

The role filled by the girls in this group is to be temporarily a part of the popular cliques when more people are needed for group activities such as sports. When not playing with the cool kids, these girls make up groups of their own comprised of three to four people. Wannabes often accept the popular clique's rejects to increase their own social status.

Middle Friendship Circles. Adler and Adler (1998) found that this group is made up of girls who were not considered popular. These girls are not interested in being cool and do not worry about their social status. This is by far the largest social group, making up about forty-five percent of an entire school grade level. This is a very diverse group made up of several subgroups of girls. There is a continuum in this group ranging from strong girls who are well-adjusted and reject the values of the popular clique to weak girls who are socially inept.

Girls in the middle social strata cluster into small groups of two or three members. These girls tend to socialize amongst themselves and mind their own business. This group has a weak hierarchy system, unlike the popular clique. Relationships tend to be intimate and more intense than in the wannabe or popular groups. There is little competition in this group. Because this group is so large, it ranges from girls who are friends with the wannabes to girls who are on the fringe of the social isolates group.

Social Isolates. Adler and Adler (1998) found that these girls have no real friends. They are the social outcasts of the whole social hierarchy. They are at the bottom of the social order and are out of place in every group. These girls are solitary and tend to be left out of group activities. These girls seem to have something different about them that make

other girls avoid them. Occasionally these girls will find friends that they can relate to, either in or out of school. This group makes up ten percent of an entire school grade level.

This social hierarchy of popularity can affect girls in each group detrimentally because competition and social dominance occurs in some form in each group, especially the popular and wannabe groups. Goodwin (2002) documented linguistic and nonverbal cues in 10 to 12-year-old females and found that competition and dominance can cause bullying and victimization of others in the social hierarchy. These forms of aggression occur to place girls above others and create a social order within groups. Bullying and victimization can have profound effects on a girl's psychological well being.

Popularity Maintenance

Purpose of Aggression. Each social group in the above hierarchy displays some form of aggression towards its members so that a social order can be maintained. Lease, Musgrove and Axelrod (2002) studied 487 students (49% female) ages 11-13. Researchers asked participants to nominate children whom they liked or disliked. Then participants were asked to rate each nominee in terms of prosocial and negative behaviors. It was found that popular girls ostracized, ridiculed, and demeaned other girls. In much of the research (Lea, 2005), the terms "nonphysical and indirect aggression" have been used. These methods have been used to obtain social resources (friends, attention and activities) and to maintain social position.

Indirect Aggression. Indirect aggression occurs when an individual uses social behaviors to harm another individual, such as purposefully withdrawing friendships or acceptance,

excluding others from group activities, isolating or ostracizing others (Goodwin, 2002).
The girls who engage in these behaviors are often clique leaders of popular groups.
Pellegrini, Brooks and Bartini (1999) had 154 (87 males, 67 females) fifth graders
nominate classmates as liked, disliked and friends. Participants were then given
Olwesus-Senior Questionnaire to rate each nominee in terms of the above behaviors and
possible victimization. It was found that use of indirect aggression increases a girl's peer
status. The clique leader's goal is often to exclude or banish those who impede group
goals. Children who are unpopular are often their target. Coleman and Byrd (2003)
asked 52 (22 males, 30 females) seventh and eighth graders to complete self-reports of
empathy, forgiveness and victimization. Teachers also completed similar measures
regarding those students. It was found that low self-reported popularity is correlated with
high teacher rated victimization.

Effects of Indirect Aggression. The behaviors previously discussed can have harmful
effects on its victims. Because social victimization entails injury to self-esteem, social
status and close friendships, victims are left feeling depressed. There is also a correlation
between peer victimization and anxiety, low self-esteem and loneliness. Studies have
shown that children who are socially rejected or alienated are at higher risks for
maladjustment, delinquent behavior, depression, dropping out of school, and suicide.

Outcomes of Popularity

Becoming a member of a peer group is one of the primary developmental tasks of
adolescence (Erikson, 1968). Peer groups are important because they influence
adolescent socialization and identity development by allowing young adolescents to

explore their own individual interests while retaining a sense of belonging within a group of friends. Although this is a critical part of normal adolescent development, there may be costs associated with becoming a member of a peer group. Peer pressure could be considered the price of group membership. Peer pressure is linked to a variety of problems including substance abuse, risk taking behavior, and delinquency, and sexual behavior (Santor, Messervey & Kusumakar, 2000). When one belongs to a group, they are required to conform to group interest and desires, which might not be the same as the individual preference. For many female adolescents, substance use, delinquent behavior and sexual activity serve as a way for girls to conform to their peer group and prove their loyalty to the group leaders.

Substance Use. Research on substance use has mainly focused on how peers influence the consumption of alcohol and illegal drugs. A recent study by Arata, Stafford and Tims (2003) had 930 participants complete a survey regarding the use of alcohol and other factors such as peer pressure. They found that conformity to peer norms and susceptibility to peer pressure were significant factors of female adolescent drinking. Researchers also found that the following problems were associated with drinking: getting into fights or arguments, doing mean things, blaming or shaming others, and neglecting responsibilities.

Peer influence is also believed to be the major cause of adolescent drug use. Peers influence drug behavior by modeling use, providing drugs, and encouraging use. Modeling occurs when peers shape the norms, attitudes, and values of each other. They also provide drugs to one another, opportunities for use, and support in their habits.

These assumptions were confirmed by a metayalisis conducted by Bauman and Ennett (1996).

Delinquent Behavior. Delinquent behavior can be defined as behavior that results in adolescents becoming involved with the legal system (crimes, drug use, gangs). In an extensive meta-analysis, Haynie (2001) found that adolescents are likely to behave in the same manner as their friends. Delinquent peers' perception of their friends' attitudes and beliefs affect their own behavior and can lead to delinquent acts. Although few adolescents reported participation in many serious delinquent activities, the majority of adolescents report participation in at least one serious one, with a minority reporting high levels of serious delinquent involvement. In addition, most adolescents are located in friendship networks that report some minor delinquency involvement.

Sexual Activity. Noham, et. al. (2001) found that girls are influenced by perceptions of peers' sexual behaviors and peer pressure to engage in sexual activity. They studied 1173 participants (51% female) in grades three through six. Participants completed a questionnaire which surveyed sexual behavior, attitudes, illnesses, sexuality, alcohol and drug use and family, peer and social relationships. Sexually-experienced girls and boys felt more pressure to engage in sexual intercourse than non-sexually experienced children, and girls felt more pressure than boys. Also, those who had engaged in sexual intercourse perceived more of their friends as sexually active.

Summary and Critique

Several variables influence female popularity, including physical attractiveness, levels of social development, and socioeconomic status. High ratings on these variables

place a girl in a popular clique. However, to remain in the clique, the girl must be very conscious of her social status and be ready to defend it at any time. To maintain her popularity, a girl might have to engage in indirect aggression, which may have negative effects on the psychological wellbeing of others. Popularity has also been linked to other negative behaviors, such as substance use, delinquent behavior and sexual activity. A girl's social network can influence her behavior in numerous ways.

The literature regarding female popularity reveals several important findings. First, almost all of the studies on variables related to popularity used girls younger than fourteen years. Second, depending on the type of popularity, females can be viewed as mature and having positive social characteristics (sociometrically popularity) or as having negative characteristics (perceived popularity) or, typically, a mixture of positive and negative characteristics. Some researchers have also grouped variables related to female popularity into socioeconomic status, social variables, academic performance, and physical attractiveness. But note that academic performance was positively associated with popularity only in studies using preadolescents (e. g., Adler & Adler ,1978). In one study using 16-18 year old girls (Santor et al.. 2000), popularity was associated with poor school performance. When a female is thought of as popular, she becomes part of the popular group in a social hierarchy.

The basis for this hierarchy is social status. Females are placed in social groups within this hierarchy based on their popularity. Each social group has it own set of rules, and children are required to follow them if they want to remain in that group. In addition, a female's peer group affects her behavior. Popular females engaged in acts of indirect

aggression to demean less popular children and increase their own status. Popular females and their peer groups can create peer pressure. Peer pressure and peer group influence have been linked to risky behaviors, including drug use, delinquency, sexual activity and drinking.

Although the above findings are important, they have been limited in several ways. The first two limitations are the focus of the current study. Most of the research has used females younger than high-school age, and also has compared popular and unpopular children. This comparison does not permit the drawing of conclusions about variables distinguishing popular from average children.

Other limitations include the lack of longitudinal studies through late adolescence. These studies do not include adults or people over twenty. Thus, the research does not address stability of popularity. Researchers have not studied what happens to popular children as they age, whether they remain popular as adolescents and young adults. Researchers are focusing on the short-term outcomes of popularity and ignoring the long-term outcomes.

There is also an ethnic limitation. The participants in studies are white middle and upper class children. Very few researchers included participants of other ethnic backgrounds in their research. It is important to study other ethnic backgrounds to find out if popularity and social network structures are the same across ethnic backgrounds.

It is also important to note that since studies of popular and unpopular children are correlational, we have not learned about causation. This study will attempt to address some of these limitations.

Statement of the Problem and Hypotheses

Although other areas of adolescent social development have received widespread attention for decades, research on teenage female popularity has received less attention. This is due, in part, to disagreement among researchers regarding the function of popularity and the variables that relate to it. In addition some parental and societal views hold that increased popularity has little or no effect on females. These views may cause many parents to misunderstand their adolescents' struggle to become popular, as well as the psychological effect this effort has on them.

With increased attention to indirect forms of aggression (e. g., social exclusion) as one of the most prevalent forms in females, researchers are now examining if female popularity is linked to this form (Pellegrini, Brooks, & Bartini, 1999). Specifically, recent research has focused on female popularity and how female popularity correlates with the psychological abuse of other girls.

There is little research on popularity in teenage girls and no research including all of the variables used in previous studies. The purpose of this study was to build upon previous research by investigating how popular high-school females are perceived by college students.

It was hypothesized that those females who are perceived as being popular, as opposed to being average or low popularity would be perceived as being more

aggressive, more socially aggressive (e. g., exclusion), more prosocial, more sociable (e. g., friendlier, less shy), have a better sense of humor (even being considered the "class clown"), be from higher SES groups (e. g., have more money), be more likely to engage in substance abuse, and be more sexually active. It was also hypothesized that factors related to female popularity will be socioeconomic status, social development, academic performance, and physical appearance. Lastly, a positive correlation between popularity of first names and perceived popularity was hypothesized. Exploratory analyses also examined the hypothesis that popularity of first name is significantly related to perceived popularity.

Method

Participants

There were 82 females (mean age = 19.20 years, SD = 1.15) and 38 males (mean age = 20.30, SD = 2.26) undergraduate and graduate students from a medium size comprehensive university in the southeast. Participant ages ranged from 18 to 29 years, and high school graduation dates ranged from 1993 to 2004; 83% of the sample graduated no more than two years prior to the experiment.

Measures

Participants completed an informed consent form (Appendix A) and a questionnaire (Appendix B), which included gender, age, high school graduation year, and type of high school attended. Participants also completed a social category scale (Coppola and Multunas, 2004). The social category scale (See Appendix C) resulted from using characteristics from previously reviewed research studies. Statements included on the scale pertained to popularity ratings of popular, average (those individuals who are neither popular nor unpopular), and unpopular high-school students. Specifically, the scale addressed the characteristics associated with being popular, being average, and not being popular. Thirty five traits were listed as possible characteristics for popular, average, and unpopular students. A Likert scale of 1 to 6 was used to rate each

characteristic (1= NEVER and 6 = ALWAYS). Participants also named popular,
average. and unpopular girls in their high schools.

Names reported by participants were rated by 30 students who were not in the
study, using a name rating questionnaire (Appendix D). These raters also provided
names of popular, average and unpopular girls from their high school (Appendix E).
Prior to filling out these measures participants signed an informed consent form
(Appendix F).

Design and Procedure

Participants were asked to complete the informed consent form, demographic
questionnaire and Social Category Scale. The Social Category Scale counterbalancing
occurred by using a Latin Square design. One third of the participants received the
ordering of popular, average and unpopular. One third of the participants received the
ordering of average, unpopular, popular. One third of the participants received the
ordering of unpopular, popular, average.

Analysis

The primary analysis was on nine dependent variables that were based on items
from the Social Category Scale. These were Aggressive, Elitist, Sociable, Sense of
Humor, Socioeconomic Status, Alcohol Use, Sexually Active, Attractive and Studious.
The Aggressive variable was comprised of the "aggressive" SCS item. The Elitist
variable was the sum of the following SCS items: "elitist, exclusionary and snobby". The
Sociable variable was the sum of the "friendly, outgoing, and generally sociable" items.
The Sense of Humor variable was the sum of the "class clown and sense of humor"

items. The SES variable was composed of the "has money, expensive clothes and has a car" items. The Alcohol variable was comprised of the "uses alcohol" item. The Sexually Active variable was created by using the "sexually active" item. The Attractive variable was created by combining the "attractive, popular with the opposite sex and has a good body" items. Lastly, the Academic variable was comprised of the "studious" item.

Results

Means and standard deviations for the popularity conditions are shown in Table 1. Repeated measure ANOVAs indicated that all main effects of popularity conditions were significant, $p < .001$. All differences between popular and unpopular girls were in the hypothesized direction (i. e., popular girls were rated as more aggressive, elitist, sociable, having a better sense of humor, from a higher SES, using more alcohol, being more sexually active and being more attractive and studious than unpopular girls.) For Aggressive, $F(2,238) = 10.268$, $p = .000$. For Elitist, $F(2,226) = 39.501$, $p = .000$. For Sociable, $F(2,234) = 188.98$, $p = .000$. For Sense of Humor, $F(2,234) = 72.075$, $p = .000$. For SES, $F(2,232) = 131.741$, $p = .000$. For Uses Alcohol, $F(2,232) = 41.496$, $p = .000$. For Sexually Active, $F(2,226) = 29.570$, $p = .000$. For Attractiveness, $F(2,236) = 294.848$, $p = .000$. For Academic, $F(2,239) = 10.631$, $p = .000$.

Table 1: *Experiment Means (and SDs) for Popularity Conditions (p<.001)*

Variables	Popular	Average	Unpopular
Aggressive	3.86 (1.42)	3.53 (2.64)	3.07 (1.68)
Elitist	12.21 (3.48)	9.78 (3.58)	8.42 (3.43)
Sociable	15.91 (1.78)	15.08 (2.23)	10.09 (3.73)
Sense of Humor	7.59 (2.09)	7.75 (2.02)	4.92 (2.20)
SES	15.78 (2.27)	13.11 (2.88)	9.52 (3.83)
Uses Alcohol	4.49 (1.51)	3.62 (1.68)	2.86 (1.68)
Sexually Active	4.43 (1.59)	3.62 (1.68)	2.79 (1.72)
Attractiveness	16.70 (1.67)	13.82 (2.64)	8.00 (4.02)
Academic	4.58 (1.24)	4.87 (1.12)	4.10 (1.66)

Post Hoc Comparisons

An additional analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between popular, average and unpopular girls within each variable. There were significant differences between all three conditions (popular, average, unpopular) for the following variables: Elitist, Sociable, SES, Use of Alcohol, Sexual Activity and Attractive. For Aggressive, there were significant differences between popular and unpopular girls and average and unpopular girls. There were no significant differences between average and popular girls. For Sense of Humor, there were significant differences between popular and unpopular

girls and average and unpopular girls. There were no significant differences between popular and average girls. For Academic, there were significant differences between popular and unpopular girls and average and unpopular girls. There were no significant differences between popular and average girls.

Name Ratings

Finally, 40 university students who were not included in the study rated the desirability of the names participants provided for popular, average and unpopular girls. In a repeated measures ANOVA comparing ratings in the three popularity conditions, $F <$ 1.00. Means (and SDs) for popular, average and unpopular girls were 2.92 (.32), 2.92 (.35) and 2.96 (.37) respectively. In examining the names, this result was not surprising, since common names (e. g., Megan, Jessica, Jennifer) were used fairly equally in the three popularity conditions, and popular girls sometimes had nontraditional names (e. g., Lucky, Phillie).

Discussion

This study examined the characteristics that make up perceived female popularity. According to past research, LaFontana and Cillessen (1998) found that perceived popularity is associated with social power. Perceived popular children were seen as dominant, aggressive, and arrogant. From these studies, prosocial behavior was associated with sociometric popularity, while aggressive and disruptive behaviors were associated with perceived popularity. (Prosocial behavior is defined as interacting with others in a positive way). Richmond, Beatty, and Dyba (1985) found that perceived unpopularity was associated with shyness for third through twelfth graders. Findings of the current study were consistent with recent research in that girls who were perceived as being popular were more likely to be aggressive, dominant, snobby, exclusionary, elitist, assertive, sexually active and use alcohol. They were also perceived as being less shy than average and unpopular adolescents. Results were also consistent with past research in that popular girls were perceived as being less prosocial or more elitist than average and unpopular adolescents.

Overall, the current study's results are consistent with current research in regards to perceived popularity. This could be due to the fact that college age students were asked about their memories from high school. Some participants

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graduated from high school several years ago. This time span between high school graduation and the time of the study could have caused memories to fade or become corrupted by current social beliefs (i.e., that a popular person in high school was not a nice person.) Results could also have been affected by current interaction with perceived popular people since high school (i.e., interactions with popular college students). Due to lack of empirical research, it is unknown whether factors of popularity are the same for both high school students and college students.

Adler and Adler (1998) found that popularity is constructed of the following factors: socioeconomic factors, social development, academic performance and physical attractiveness. According Adler and Adler, popular girls are more likely to have more material wealth, be more social, have higher grades and be more physically attractive than average and unpopular girls. Results of the current study indicated that popular girls were more likely to have material wealth (i.e., money, car, expensive clothes) and more likely to be attractive, outgoing, friendly, and more studious than unpopular girls.

Aspects of Adler and Adler's four constructs for popularity (attractiveness, SES, social development and academic performance) were found in this experiment. The current study confirms these four factors, meaning that material wealth, social development, physical attractiveness and academic performance were attributed to popular girls, rather than to average and unpopular ones. Again, this could be due to past or current experience.

Past research found that for elementary-school children (Busse & Seraydarian, 1979), girls who were rated as popular by their peers had names that were more desirable

(based on previous research) than the names of less popular girls. Young, Kennedy, Newhouse, Browne, et al. (1993) found that college students rated unknown persons with high frequency names as more popular than those with lower frequency names. Findings of the current research study were inconsistent with these results. There was little difference between girls with desirable names and those with less desirable names in regards to popularity. This could have been due to the names that were used in the study. Names for the study were generated by the local population; this resulted in the study including names that might not have been unknown or less desirable (i.e., Phillie, Lucky) to a more diverse population. Also many of the same names (i.e., Jennifer, Megan) were used to describe popular, average and unpopular girls.

Implications

Past research indicates (Santor, Messervey & Kusumakar, 2000) that adolescents (regardless of gender and popularity status) are at a high risk of engaging in maladaptive behaviors such as drug and alcohol use, bullying (direct/indirect) and delinquent behavior. The current study along with past research could be useful in creating empirically-based interventions targeting substance abuse, bullying and criminal behaviors. Examples of effective interventions would be creating a community-based drug prevention program that targets children of all ages. Another intervention that could be created would be a school based anti-bullying campaign that addresses the signs and symptoms of bullying, the differences between direct and indirect bullying and support services for those children being bullied (i.e., school psychologists, counselors, administrators). Delinquent behaviors (i.e., crime, gangs) can also be addressed through

community and school based interventions that focus on promoting an adolescent's positive actions (i.e., volunteering, good grades) and discouraging maladaptive actions (i.e., gang involvement).

Lastly, the above findings can be used to promote positive behaviors in girls, such as focusing on boasting self esteem and self awareness, promoting involvement in group activities, teaching adaptive social skills and encouraging academic progress of girls of all popularity statuses. The above characteristics have been correlated with successful outcomes for adolescents (Finn & Rock, 1997).

Limitations

This study was limited by several factors including a small homogenous study population, age of participants, gender of participants, time elapsed from time of graduation to time of study, current beliefs about popularity and assessment instruments used. The sample size of the study was small (120) and homogenous. Many participants were Anglo-Saxon, Caucasian and from a middle-class socioeconomic background. This makes results less generalizable to a national population. The sample for this study was comprised of many more females than males (82 females, 38 males). Time between graduation of high school and participation in the study ranged from a few months to several years, which could have caused memory distortions that could affect results (Pansky & Koriat, 2004). Lastly, beliefs change as we age, and this could be the case with the participants in this study. Participants could have different feelings about people they once perceived as popular (Stodolska, 2005).

Assessment instruments could also have affected the outcome of this study. Assessment scales were created by reviewing past popularity research. In the past, researchers created their own instruments by analyzing various factors to see if they correlated with known factors of popularity (i.e., SES, physical development, social development). The same was done for this experiment as well. Rather than factor analysis, it would have been helpful to use a standardized rating scale of popularity. However, at the time no such scale existed. Perhaps in the future a standardized popularity scale will be created and used for this type of research.

Further Research

Ideal conditions for this study would have been to use a much larger, more diverse population. Preferably, equal numbers of males and females would be in the sample. Time between high school graduation and time of the survey should be a few months at most.

Questionnaires were also a limitation of this study. At the time of the study standardized questionnaires were not created to measure perceived popularity. The researcher had to create a simple Likert scale with characteristics taken from past research. This caused some confusion about vague terms such as "cool," "prosocial," and "visible." It would have been ideal to have a standardized questionnaire that was created specifically for the study's population with characteristics that were more specific.

Further research could be completed in the area of perceived popularity within the high school setting. It would be interesting to see how high schoolers perceive popular,

average and unpopular girls. Also, this would lessen memory corruption and capture the participants' opinions of the moment.

Further research might also examine in more depth how first names are correlated with popularity. It is suggested that popular names be taken from a national sample and then compiled into a list that participants can rate as being liked, neutral or disliked. This might create results that are consistent with current research.

Lastly, current popularity research should be linked to practical use. In other words, how can knowing the factors of female popularity be useful in creating interventions for a school-based population? To answer this question researchers must be able to connect the positive and negative (i.e., high self esteem, increased bullying behaviors) aspects of popularity with the current issues facing adolescent girls (i.e., peer pressure, eating disorder, substance abuse).

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Appendices

Appendix A

Informed Consent Form

I am performing a study regarding social structure in high school. This study will examine factors associated with social status in male and female students. Participation in this study will be completely voluntary; participants are free to refuse to participate at any time for whatever reason. At the conclusion of the study, a summary of group results will be made available to all interested participants. Should you have any questions or desire further information, please contact me (Harmony Coppola) at 828-227-6598 (home), or Dr. Hedy White at the Department of Psychology, at Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, NC 28723 (828-227-7361). You can also contact Dr. M. Abel, Chairperson for the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Participants at Western Carolina University, at 828-227-3369.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation and support.

Sincerely,

Harmony Coppola (Researcher)

Name: _____

Date: _____

Signature: _____

Appendix B

Demographic Questionnaire

AGE:_____

GENDER: (PLEASE CIRCLE ONLY ONE)

MALE FEMALE

GRADUATION YEAR IN HIGH SCHOOL:_____

STATE IN WHICH YOU ATTENDED HIGH SCHOOL:_____

CITY/TOWN IN WHICH YOU ATTENDED HIGH SCHOOL:_____

TYPE OF SCHOOL YOU GRADUATED FROM (PLEASE CIRCLE ONLY ONE):

PUBLIC

PRIVATE NON-RELIGIOUS

PRIVATE RELIGIOUS

PRIVATE/RELIGIOUS BOYS

PRIVATE/RELIGIOUS GIRLS

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Appendix C

Social Category Scale

PLEASE RATE EACH OF THE FOLLOWING CHARACTERISTICS YOU CONSIDER THE POPULAR FEMALE IN YOUR HIGH SCHOOL TO HAVE HAD.

PLEASE LIST THE NAME OF THE POPULAR GIRL YOU ARE RATING: _____

Characteristics	Always	Most Times	Sometimes	Seldom	Rarely	Never
1. Athletic						
2. Assertive						
3. Dominant						
4. In Leadership Role						
5. Prominent						
6. Visible						
7. Elitist						
8. Exclusionary						
9. Cool						
10. Prosocial						
11. Studious						
12. Aggressive						
13. Has Money						
14. Shy						
15. Snobby						
Characteristics	**Always**	**Most Times**	**Sometimes**	**Seldom**	**Rarely**	**Never**
16. Attractive						
17. Liked						
18. Friendly						
19. Outgoing						
20. Has a good personality						
21. Has a good body						
22. Popular with the opposite sex						
23. Participates in sports						
24. Generally sociable						
25. Nice clothes						
26. Expensive clothes						
27. Participates in school clubs						
28. Participates in school gov't.						
29. Sexually active						
30. Has a car						
31. Goes to parties						
32. Has a good reputation						
33. Uses alcohol						
34. Class clown						
35. Sense of humor						

NOTE: The same information was obtained for average and unpopular individuals.

Appendix D

Name Rating Questionnaire

1. Your gender (check one): Male____ Female____

2. Would you please rate the extent to which you like or dislike each of the following names.
After each name provide one of these numbers:

1 = like the name very much 2 = like the name 3 = neither like nor dislike 4 = do not like the name
5 = dislike the name very much

Amari ___	Lindsey___	Shannon___	Trisha___	Tori___	Shreya___
Whitney ___	Tonya ___	Evie ___	Samantha____	Ann___	Samet___
Amber____	Janeta ___	Amanda___	Beth ___	Savannah___	Keri___
Josie____	Leah ___	Julie ___	Caitlin ___	Jacqueline___	Jenna___
Morgan____	Carly ___	Carolina___	Adrianne ___	Kerra___	Danielle___
Shauna____	Angel ___	Grace ___	Carla ___	Marline___	Calina___
Dana____	Joy ___	Melissa ___	Krystal ___	Kellyn___	Alisha___
Lauren____	Tanya ___	Tasia ___	Phillie ___	Shanae ___	Bekha ___
Kathy____	Maria ___	Jade ___	Sarah ___	Alla___	Casey___
Allison____	Tiffany ___	Darby ___	Andrew ___	Rebecca___	Cindy___
Nancy____	Emily ___	Ashton ___	Katie ___	Martha___	Christy___
Courtney____	Anita ___	Cheryl ___	Maggie ___	April___	Kayla___
Shea____	Catherine___	Gina ___	Shanna ___	Brandi___	Stacy___
Jackie____	Isolda ___	Audry ___	Alexus ___	Cathleen___	
Abby____	Elissa ___	Dee ___	Anna ___	Kim___	
Nikki____	Jenn ___	Monica ___	Crystal ___	Linda___	
Erin____	Kit ___	Rosa ___	Angela ___	Margie___	
Shan____	Tamara ___	Jamie ___	Autumn ___	Patrice___	
Aerret____	Jodi ___	Rachael___	Kacie ___	Rita___	
Geana____	Laura ___	Alex ___	Reva ___	Marilee___	
Tracey____	Molly ___	Haley ___	Steffi ___	Claire___	
Valerie____	Stephanie___	PJ ___	Algcia ___	Bethany___	
Jill____	Amy ___	Lesley ___	Sandy ___	Brittany___	
Lucky____	Blaire ___	Mary ___	Ashley ___	Candace___	
Ashtin____	Janis ___	Halie ___	Brandice ___	Emlie___	
Lisa____	Michelle ___	Theo ___	Kristina ___	Christina___	
Nicole____	Tabby ___	Alli ___	Siobhan ___	Brooke___	
Shelby____	Becky ___	Heather___	Taylor ___	Megan___	
Jordan____	Hannah ___	Jerry ___	Amesha ___	Carolina___	
Rachel____	Georgia ___	Summer___	Chloe ___	Chelsea___	
Mackenzie___	Jennifer ___	Tammy___	Kristen ___	Jessica___	
Sophia____	Kristy ___	Laurel___	Tia ___ ___	Melanie___	

Appendix E

Popularity Questionnaire

1. Please provide the **first** name of an extremely popular girl from your high

   school_____

2. Please provide the **first** name of a girl from your high school who was
   average in

   popularity_____

3. Please list the **first** name of an extremely unpopular girl from your high

   school_____

Appendix F

Informed Consent Form

I am performing a study regarding people's opinions of first names.
Participation in this study will be completely voluntary; participants are free to
refuse to participate at any time for whatever reason. At the conclusion of the
study, a summary of group results will be made available to all interested
participants. Should you have any questions or desire further information, please
contact me (Harmony Coppola) at 828-227-6598 (home), or Dr. Hedy White at
the Department of Psychology, at Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, NC
28723 (828-227-7361). You can also contact Dr. M. Abel, Chairperson for the
Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Participants at Western
Carolina University, at 828-227-3369.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation and support.

Sincerely,

Harmony Coppola (Researcher)

Name:_____

Date:_____

Signature:_____