Abstract: We study the relative influence of female and male students using a year-long, network-based field experiment of an anti-harassment intervention program in a high school. A randomly selected subset of highly connected students participated in the intervention. We test whether these highly connected females and males influenced other students equally when students and teachers considered the problem of “drama”—peer conflict and harassment—to be associated with girls more than with boys. We find that exposure to male, but not female, intervention students caused decreased perceptions of the acceptability of harassment and decreased participation in negative behavior. Status beliefs became activated through the intervention program: gender difference in influence stem from higher levels of respect afforded to highly connected males in the program.

Keywords social influence, gender, social networks, norms, adolescents, bullying
Peer harassment in middle and high schools has received enormous public and scholarly attention over the last several years (e.g., Bazelon 2013; Juvonen and Graham 2014). One perspective on the source of aggressive behavior and harassment comes from theories of collective norms. According to these theories, individuals’ behavior is driven by their perceptions of what behaviors are considered typical or desirable by their peer groups (e.g., Cialdini and Goldstein 2004). Individuals quickly and easily perceive cues regarding what others do (for example, drinking on a college campus) and adjust their behavior in light of these cues (Prentice and Miller 1993). We know that students with friends who participate in bullying or aggressive behavior are more likely to participate themselves as they model their own behavior on that of their peers (Mouttapa et al. 2004). Thus, girls and boys who participate in drama at school are responding to cues about the social standards of their peers at school. In this account, harassment is not driven primarily by individual characteristics, but by the “rules of the game” that prevail in a given social environment.

Given the importance of the “rules of the game,” who influences these rules? That is, which students have the most influence over the perceived collective norms and thus behaviors in a school? We investigate this question in the case of “drama,” which students and staff defined as gossip, rumors, exclusion, mean looks in the hallway, and occasional physical confrontations. In line with wider stereotypes (e.g., Males and Chesney-Lind 2010), students and adults at the school associated drama with girls more than with boys. At the same time, previous research highlights that males often exert greater influence in groups. We conducted a novel, year-long field experiment, in which we randomly assigned a subset of all highly connected male and female students (we call these students social referents; see Paluck and Shepherd 2012 for further explanation) in a high school network to lead an in-school intervention in which the students publically indicate their opposition to peer harassment. We test whether male and female students affect their peers’ perceptions of school norms about harassment and their actual harassment behavior to the same extent.
Gender and Social Influence

There are several reasons we might expect females to exert more influence than males in the school examined here. First, many studies of the relative influence of males and females find that men exert greater influence over others than do women, except in domains that are associated with women, where women exert more influence (see Carli 2001). Because the behavior we look at here—peer harassment and conflict—is typed as female behavior by students and teachers at the school, we would expect the behavior of female social referents to serve as a stronger cue to peers regarding perceived norms of drama, compared to male social referents. Second, the gender composition of the group also affects the degree of influence of males and females. When the composition of the group is gender-balanced, women are more able to exert influence on others than when they are in the minority (Craig and Sherif 1986; Taps and Martin 1990). In the school under study, the majority of students were female: 57 percent of the 291 students. Female students may therefore as the prototype—a representative exemplar—of students at the school. Students may use and remember the behavioral cues from prototypical students (girls) more than those from other students when forming impressions of collective norms. Thus, both the gendered nature of drama and the majority status of females in the school network lead to the prediction that female social referents will exert more influence over the norm perceptions and behaviors of their peers than would male social referents: the more exposure a student has to female intervention referents, the less they will perceive drama to be acceptable and desirable. Greater exposure to female intervention referents will lead students to participate less often in harassment-related behavior and more often in pro-social behavior

By contrast, there are also several theories that might suggest that male social referents may be more influential than female social referents with respect to drama in the school. For example, in some studies, men who are in the minority exert disproportionate influence on the group (Craig and Sherif 1986; Williams 1995). Boys’ behavior may become more salient in the school because of their smaller
numbers. Additionally, the behaviors of male social referents may stand out more to their peers because they are incongruent with expectations about who participates in typical peer harassment behaviors. Boys may be just as involved in harassment as girls, but because they are not associated with drama and harassment to the same extent as are girls, male social referents’ behavior or publically expressed beliefs about harassment may draw greater attention.

Another explanation is that males are typically afforded more respect than are females (e.g., Ridgeway 2011). Gender-based status beliefs—widely shared beliefs about the relative competence, authority and esteem of individuals in particular social categories—guide individuals to infer that males are more competent and worthy of respect than females in many domains, not only those associated with their gender (e.g., Ridgeway and Correll 2004). For example, individuals in groups more often listen to males when they speak and take their comments more seriously, which makes their points of view more influential in group decision making (e.g., Kollock, Blumstein, and Schwartz 1985; Ridgeway et al. 2009). This perspective suggests that even when a behavior is associated more with girls, male social referents would exert more influence over their peers because they are afforded greater respect; the more exposure a student has to male intervention referents, the less they will perceive drama to be acceptable and desirable. Greater exposure to male intervention referents will lead students to participate less often in harassment-related behavior and more often in pro-social behavior.

Method

Experimental Context

We studied students enrolled in a small public high school (N=291) with three grades from 10th to 12th that drew students from urban and suburban areas of Connecticut. Fifty-seven percent of students were female; 42% African American, 27% Latino, 22% White; 59% of students were new to the school that year; between 40 and 50% of students received free or reduced-price lunches. The school was a magnet school; many of these students moved to the school after poor experiences in another school either due to their own behavior or due to how they were treated by other students. At this school, both staff and
students perceived that girls were the most frequent participants in drama. For example, in response to a question regarding how to explain the school to a new student, one student said,

Girls are always starting drama… You fight with friends here [if they are fighting, you fight alongside them], back them up. Girls say what is on their minds. For guys, they are more laid back, but they have quick tempers and more instant confrontations. (Student KP, personal communication, May 2011)

Other research has identified this form of peer harassment, often called relational conflict, as occurring particularly among girls, and physical aggression as occurring more frequently among boys (e.g., Archer and Coyne 2005). In response to observations regarding high levels of harassment among students and particularly among girls, the school commissioned the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) to run an intervention program called “Names Can Really Hurt Us” (referred to below as NAMES). The NAMES intervention prepares a small group of selected students to present their experiences of and reasons to oppose harassment (verbal or physical abuse and social ostracism) in a school-wide assembly.

Prior to the intervention program, we analyzed the school’s social network using surveys at the beginning of the school year to identify a pool of social referent students. We then randomly assigned a subset of those social referents to participate in the program. Participation included leading a school-wide assembly in the fall and providing reminders about the themes of the program through publicity campaigns during the remainder of the school year. We first describe the school-wide survey to illustrate how we identified the social referent students within the school’s social network while measuring students’ perceived norms, beliefs, and experiences of harassment prior to the intervention. (See Shepherd and Paluck [2015] for additional information about the study.)

**School-Wide Survey: Social Network and Norms Measurement**

One week after school began in September, we administered a survey during a single class period to every student in the school (260 students due to absences on the survey day and in the days following). The survey consisted of four parts: demographic information, questions about relationships with other
students (social network questions), personal beliefs about and experiences of harassment-related events at the school, and perceptions of collective social norms regarding harassment at the school. Based on previous work on harassment in schools, and on initial qualitative work in which students referred to harassment as “drama,” we adopted the term “starting drama” to refer to these issues in all relevant survey questions. We defined drama in the survey as “talking behind the backs of other students or to their faces in a mean or rude way; spreading rumors by text, Facebook, MySpace posts, or IMs; giving other students mean or rude looks in the hall.”

Network questions. Six questions elicited students’ relationships with other students. We focus on two questions in particular: first, a behavioral measure of friendship (“With whom did you spend time in the last week?”) and second, nominations of high prestige students (i.e., students “who you really respect”). We provided each student with a complete roster of students in the school, arranged by grade, sorted alphabetically by first name, and numbered. Students used the numbers to nominate an unrestricted number of students for each question.

We use the spending time together question, measured two more times throughout the year, to approximate the frequency with which a student is exposed to the behavior of their peers. In particular, we use this question alone to map the social interactions through which we trace the influence of the intervention referents. We use the number of respect nominations, also measured two more times throughout the year, as a measure of relative status of students in the school.

Identification of Social Referent Students. We used social network questions from the first survey to construct the complete network of relationships among students at the school. From this network of relationships, we identified social referent students: students who received many friendship nominations and whose connections also shared friendship connections to each other, in addition to students with many friendship nominations whose connections did not share friendship connections.
Thus, we captured both students who were leaders of tightly interconnected groups in the school and students who were widely known to many other students.

**Random assignment of social referents to intervention.** The final pool contained 83 eligible social referent students. We randomly selected 30 of these students to participate in the intervention. Six of these students refused participation in the program, leaving 24 social referent students who participated in the intervention (16 girls and 8 boys; equal numbers of sophomores, juniors, and seniors; 4 students who identified as white, 11 who identified as black, 7 who identified as Latino, 1 student who identified as biracial, and 1 student who declined to report his race), and 53 control social referent students who did not participate in the intervention. Below, when we refer to control social referents, we mean those social referent students who were not randomly selected for the program; by intervention referents, we mean social referent students who were randomly assigned to participate in the intervention from the pool of eligible social referents.

**Collective norms.** We used a series of five questions to measure perceptions of prescriptive norms regarding drama, specifically perceptions of student approval of drama, and of behavior that can deescalate drama. We averaged the values for these five questions (“How many students at [school]... believe it’s normal when students start drama or any other kind of conflict with other students?”; “…believe it’s wrong, or would criticize you, if you tried to stop other students from starting drama?”; “… believe it’s wrong, or would criticize you, if you did not defend your friends when someone else was making drama for them?”; “…believe it’s wrong, or would criticize you, if you ignored rumors about you, rather than defending yourself?”; and “…believe it is important to defend your friends when someone is making drama for them?”) to create one composite measure.

Students responded to these questions using a pictogram with six options, each of which featured a collection of outlined figures. The proportion of shaded figures in each picture represented the percentage of students who believed or supported the statement (e.g., 1= “Nobody,” no shaded figures, 3= “About
50%,” half shaded figures, 6=”Almost everybody,” all shaded figures). By using percentages, we capture students’ perceptions of the sentiments of the collective as opposed to sentiments of each individual’s idea of a prototypical group member.

A successful intervention would create the perception of less widespread approval for behaviors supporting drama, and therefore smaller scores on the composite norms scale at later waves. Students would perceive behaviors that deescalate conflict such as stopping others from “starting drama,” refusing to participate in the conflicts of friends, and ignoring instead of engaging rumors about oneself, to be more desirable and normal. We consulted with school staff and students in order to capture school-specific issues and appropriate language.

**Second and third wave surveys**

We administered the social network and norms survey described above to the entire school two more times: one week after the intervention described below and at the end of the school.

**Behavioral Outcome Measures**

**Behavior reported by teachers.** In a survey administered before the start of the NAMES program and at the end of the year, teachers and administrators used the school roster to nominate students “who defend other students when they are being harassed or picked on,” which we consider a prosocial measure of attempting to support other students and stop the cycle of drama, and students who “cause the most trouble or contribute to a negative school environment.” Students received a point in these categories for each nomination from a teacher or administrator. To the extent that teachers and administrators pay attention to the everyday behaviors of their students, these measures provide an overall assessment of student behavior that captures even subtle harassment behaviors.

**Disciplinary records.** We obtained the complete school records of all disciplinary events receiving administrative attention throughout the school year. We combined codes for “peer harassment” and “disruptive behavior” towards peers to create a variable for whether a student was disciplined for peer harassment at school. While formal disciplinary reports capture only a small percentage of harassment
behavior, they provide one measure of how frequently students are participating in peer harassment broadly defined, and poor behavior generally.

**Intervention**

The NAMES assembly program broadcasts certain students’ experiences with and reactions to harassment to the student body, and facilitates public discussion about harassment among students. On the day of the assembly in October, the intervention referents performed the skit about a rumor spreading about a girl being a “slut,” something that the intervention students identified as a common form of harassment at the school. After the skit, five intervention referents (three girls and two boys) read essays they wrote about their own experiences of harassment. One girl’s essay described switching elementary schools because a girl had mobilized her group of friends to continuously harass her, while another girl spoke of her own participation in making fun of other students. One of the boys talked about getting in a physical fight at school, which perpetuated a cycle of aggression. In between the intervention referents’ performances, an ADL representative spoke about the effects of harassment.

At the end of the assembly, there was an open microphone session in which any student could share their own experiences and dozens of students did so. After the assembly, all students were divided into small groups to discuss the assembly, supervised by intervention referents and adults. Follow-up events during the school year reinforced the association between the intervention referents and anti-drama messages. Intervention referents read announcements about the consequences of harassment over the loudspeaker during morning announcements, designated a special “NAMES” table at lunch period two times during the year where they spoke with other students about ways to report harassment, and created a series of posters featuring photos of intervention referents, and one of several anti-drama and pro-inclusion slogans such as “Whatever your story, I’ll listen” and “People who spread rumors are no friends of mine.”
Though all students in the school were exposed to the initial assembly program, we are interested in the causal effect of everyday exposure, represented by *spend time network ties* (ties measured by the question “with whom did you spend time with in the last week” described above), to intervention social referents on norm perceptions and behaviors.

**Analytic Approach**

We measure the effect of the number of social network ties to female and male intervention referents (measured by students reporting that they spent time with the female or male intervention referents in the last week), accounting for their ties to control students, on students’ perceptions of collective norms and their behavior. In our regression analyses, we examine the effect of each student’s treatment *dosage*, measured in terms of the number of the student’s direct spend time ties to randomly assigned female and male intervention referents, controlling for the student’s total number of ties. See Figure 1 for a representation of the design. For the purposes of the analyses, we consider all treatment social referents’ participation in the intervention to be equivalent.

![Figure 1. Schematic representation of experimental design.](image)
Results

*Gendered Perceived Collective Norms.* Both males and females viewed the norms at the school for the key behavior of “starting drama” as particularly strong among girls. At wave 3, students were significantly more likely to indicate that it was normal for girls to start drama than to indicate it was normal for boys to start drama.

We first test the hypotheses that female and male intervention referents are differentially effective at communicating collective social norms regarding harassment for a gender-coded behavior. Lower scores on the collective norms measure indicate perceptions that other students in the school do not support harassment-related behaviors (see Table 1). We control for norm perceptions at the first wave, number of ties to all male students and number of ties to all female students, in addition to gender, whether the student was new to the school, and academic performance.

Our findings are consistent with the hypothesis that the public behavior of male intervention referents exerts relatively more influence on their network peers’ perceived collective norms than does that of female intervention referents. With respect to behavior, male and female intervention referents both influence the behavior of students who spend time with them, but the effect of ties to male intervention referents on behavior is stronger and more consistent across different measures of behavior. The results suggest that male intervention referents provide a strong cue and exert greater influence over their peers regarding norms about female-coded behavior. We next investigate a likely source of this greater influence based on the theory that males are more influential because they are believed to be more competent and are afforded more respect than are females.
Table 1. Estimates of Harassment-Related Norms and Behaviors by Ties to Female and Male Intervention Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor variables</th>
<th>T1 value (norm or nomination)</th>
<th>Ties to female intervention students</th>
<th>Ties to male intervention students</th>
<th>Total number of ties to female students</th>
<th>Total number of ties to male students</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Attended last year</th>
<th>GPA</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
<th>Log likelihood</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Norm composite, T2</td>
<td>.35***</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.25*</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>-39.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norm composite, T3</td>
<td>.24**</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disciplinary action: peer harassment (odds ratio)</td>
<td>.13†</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>-.24**</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>.36*</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>.36***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disciplinary action: all reports</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher nomination: defend others</td>
<td>.39***</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>-.25**</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.33***</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher nomination: create negative environment</td>
<td>.26***</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.14*</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Estimates are standardized regression coefficients except where noted as odds ratios from logit models. Male is a dummy variable (0 = female, 1 = male), as is attended last year (0 = no, 1 = yes). GPA is a continuous variable of students’ grade point average. The regression includes fixed effects (not shown). †p < .10. *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.
Respect and Social Influence

Even within gender groups, not all intervention referents’ behavioral signals were equal; students participated in follow-up activities throughout the year, took on the cause of the program as their own, and participated in peer harassment themselves to varying degrees. Differences between intervention referents likely affect how influential they are. One of these differences, which may have consequences for the extent of the influence of intervention referents, is how widely respected they are at the school. “Respect” is a status concept distinct from being popular. According to interviews, respected students were social and “put themselves out there” but they also stood up for other students when they were having trouble. To be respected, students had to be respectful themselves.

We assess whether intervention referents who are more respected by their peers exert greater influence over the norm perceptions and behaviors of those with spend time ties to them. Second, we examine the extent to which gender and respect are correlated, and specifically whether male intervention students receive more respect nominations from their peers than do female intervention students.

Influence of High and Low Respect Intervention Referents. At each wave of measurement, we consider intervention students to be “highly respected” when they are at or above the median number of respect nominations all intervention students received from their peers. We repeated our analyses above, but rather than predicting perceived norms and behavior based on ties to social referents distinguished by gender, we distinguished between ties to referents with relatively high and relatively low numbers of respect nominations. See results in table 2.

We find consistent support for the claim that having more ties to high respect intervention students leads to perceiving norms that do not support harassment at wave 2, and to more prosocial behaviors: less participation in harassment, less participation in any events meriting discipline, more teacher nominations as someone who defends other students when they are getting harassment, and fewer teacher nominations as someone who contributes to a negative school environment.
Table 2. Estimates of Norms and Harassment-Related Behaviors by Ties to High and Low Respect Intervention Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor variables</th>
<th>T2 norm composite</th>
<th>T3 norm composite</th>
<th>Disciplinary action: peer harassment (odds ratio)</th>
<th>Disciplinary action: all reports</th>
<th>Teacher nomination: defend others</th>
<th>Teacher nomination: create negative environment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T1 norm composite</td>
<td>.36***</td>
<td>.25**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T1 teacher nomination</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ties to high respect intervention students</td>
<td>-.27**</td>
<td>-.20</td>
<td>-.21†</td>
<td>.16*</td>
<td>.18*</td>
<td>-.28**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ties to low respect intervention students</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>.042</td>
<td>-.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of ties</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.19†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.15*</td>
<td>5.78*</td>
<td>-.11†</td>
<td>.23***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended last year</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPA</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>.32*</td>
<td>.14*</td>
<td>-.20**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log likelihood</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Estimates are standardized regression coefficients, except where noted as odds ratios from logit models. All other variables the same as described in Table 1. †p < .10. *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.
Having more ties to low respect intervention students did not change students’ norm perceptions or behaviors. These results demonstrate that not all intervention referents were equally influential: those who were considered respected by their peers exerted more influence on their network neighbors.

*Respect Nominations by Gender.* To what extent is the experimental effect of ties to male intervention referents a result of their being more respected in the school than female intervention referents? We test for gender differences among intervention students in the likelihood of being nominated by peers as someone they respect at each survey wave. Results are provided in table 3. Compared to the general school population, intervention students regardless of gender have more respect nominations at wave 1. At wave 2, we find an interaction effect whereby intervention males have many more respect nominations than their general school population counterparts, but intervention females have the same number of respect nominations as do their general school population counterparts (controlling for wave 1 respect nominations). This pattern is replicated at wave 3, though intervention females at wave 3 have even fewer respect nominations than do their general school population counterparts.

To what extent are the differential respect nominations for male and female intervention referents due to the intervention itself, as opposed to a trend in the school unrelated to the intervention? We examine the number of respect nominations by gender, comparing those students selected for the intervention to control students who were in the eligible pool of social referents but who were not randomly selected to participate. These students provide a rigorous test of whether the males randomly selected to participate in the intervention had more respect nominations across the year as a result of participating in the program itself.

We find suggestive evidence that participation in the intervention itself positively affected the number of respect nominations of intervention males more than those of intervention girls. There are no differences in the number of respect nominations between intervention and control referents based on gender at wave 1. However, male intervention referents experienced an increase in the number of respect
Table 3. Regression Estimates of Number of Respect Nominations by Treatment Status and Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Comparison: all students at school and intervention students</th>
<th>Comparison: control students and intervention students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of respect nominations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T1</td>
<td>T2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of T1 respect nominations</td>
<td></td>
<td>.39***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intervention students</td>
<td>.22**</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intervention students X male</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.23**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Coefficients are standardized regression coefficients. Nonintervention eligible students are the default category for the comparison on the left side of the table. Control students are the default category for the comparison on the right side of the table. *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.
nominations they received compared to their control counterparts at the two waves after the intervention, while female intervention referents received fewer respect nominations, particularly at wave 3, as a result of their participation in the intervention.

This evidence is consistent with a status beliefs explanation that boys’ participation in the intervention was interpreted more favorably than girls’ participation by other students, indicated by the respect “bump” that boys received following the intervention and by the decrease in respect nominations among intervention girls relative to control girls. This effect appears to be unrelated to changed behavior from intervention males compared to control males, or from intervention females compared to control females.

**Discussion**

Using a field experiment randomizing which students participated in an anti-harassment program, we find that male students who participated in the intervention program influenced their network neighbors’ harassment-related behaviors and perceptions of collective norms about drama, even when the behaviors were most commonly associated with girls. Among students who reported spending time with male intervention referents, the perceived acceptability of harassment and participation in harassment behaviors declined. Female students exerted influence over fewer harassment behaviors of their network neighbors compared to male students in the program. More respected intervention students influenced the norm perceptions and behaviors of their network neighbors while low respect intervention students did not. Males who participated in the intervention gained respect nominations more than did females who participated in the program, leading to the conclusion that boys’ relative influence was at least in part a product of their increased respect after the intervention program.

The pattern of respect nominations across the school year is consistent with an account that the intervention males were more influential because they were afforded respect following their program participation. General population boys were not more respected than were general population girls; girls
in general received more respect nominations across the year. Instead, boys – but not girls – who were randomly selected to become highly salient through their participation in the NAMES intervention became more respected in the school. Status beliefs about the relative competence of males in the school were not generalized to all males, but were activated by the intervention, and this contributed to the greater influence of male intervention students over their peers’ behavior. Thus, the results provide a nuanced account of how status beliefs become important in real-world settings over time.

This work draws on a network-based account of social influence and behavioral patterns: individuals’ perceptions of group norms develop from the behavioral cues they get from others in the group, which are structured by patterns of interaction within the group, both network-level characteristics and individual network position. These findings have implications for practitioners interested in changing the “culture” or “climate” of a group, and suggest that targeting the public behavior of social referents can change their peers’ behavior and perceptions.
REFERENCES


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