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Abstract

This study examined two social status goals in relation to aggressive and prosocial behaviors as well as attributions for relational aggression among 477 (244 girls) Chinese early adolescents. Findings indicate that, after controlling for each other, the social preference goal was negatively related to self-reported overt aggression, and positively associated with prosocial behaviors as reported by self, peers, and teachers, whereas the popularity goal was not uniquely related to either aggressive or prosocial behaviors. Regarding attributions, adolescents with the popularity goal displayed a tendency to justify relational aggression by not attributing it to the aggressor's characteristics (e.g., jealousy). In contrast, adolescents with the social preference goal were more likely to attribute relational aggression to the aggressor's characteristics as well as neutral reasons. Findings of this study highlight the importance

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of investigating the social cognitive processes of peer status among adolescents.

Keywords

peer status, social goal, popularity, social preference, attribution, social status goal

Children pay increasing attention to their social standing among peers as they enter into adolescence (Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 2006). Given that adolescents do not necessarily start out as popular or well liked, they may generate social goals regarding desired peer statuses (i.e., social status goals) and actively attempt to achieve those goals (Levy, Kaplan, & Patrick, 2004; Ryan, Hicks, & Midgley, 1997). Despite advances in research on peer status, little is known about adolescents' social status goals and how these goals relate to social behaviors. Furthermore, social information processing research suggests that children of various peer statuses may make different attributions regarding why aggression takes place, which further relates to their later engagement in these behaviors (Crick, 1995; Crick & Dodge, 1996; Yoon, Hughes, Cavell, & Thompson, 2000). The latter findings shed light on the implication of social cognitive processes regarding peer status on behavioral development.

The current study extends previous research on peer status by investigating how adolescents' desires for social preference (social preference goal) or popularity (popularity goal) are related to their aggression, prosocial behaviors, and attributions for relational aggression using a sample of Chinese early adolescents. Given that little peer status research has been conducted with non-Western samples (Schwartz et al., 2010), the current research will provide useful information regarding contextual contributions to adolescents' social cognitive processes and behavioral characteristics associated with peer status.

Peer Status and Behavioral Correlates

Actively pursued by adolescents, peer status is an important component of peer relations during adolescence (Rubin et al., 2006). High peer status has been defined in terms of social preference (i.e., likeability; assessed through "like most/like least" peer nominations) and popularity (i.e., perceived popularity representing centrality and visibility; assessed through "unpopular/

popular” peer nominations; Coie, Dodge, & Kupersmidt, 1990; Rose, Swenson, & Waller, 2004). Well-liked children usually have higher level of prosocial behaviors and are well adjusted (Rubin et al., 2006). Popularity is associated with both positive (e.g., athletic, socially central, prosocial) and negative (e.g., relational aggressive and antisocial) characteristics (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004; Lafontana & Cillessen, 1999, 2002; Parkhurst & Hopmeyer, 1998; Prinstein & Cillessen, 2003; Xie, Swift, Cairns, & Cairns, 2002). Observations from related disciplines also show consistent patterns. Moffitt (1993) explains that adolescents experience a “maturity gap” between biological maturity and social maturity and are likely to use antisocial behaviors to achieve a high social status. Not only does popularity directly relate to aggression, but it also moderates adolescents’ influence on friends’ behaviors. Haynie (2001) found that the more popular adolescents were the stronger the association between their delinquent behavior and their friends’. These studies provide valuable information about behavioral correlates of peer status.

Social Behaviors and Peer Status in the Chinese Cultural Context

Cultural norms and values may influence the acceptability of both aggressive and prosocial behaviors and guide adolescents’ endorsement or suppression of these behaviors (Chen & French, 2008). In the Chinese culture, social harmony is valued and reinforced through the emphasis of cooperation and compliant behavior and the suppression of aggressive behaviors (Bond & Wang, 1983; Chen, 2010). Consequently, Chinese children display more prosocial-cooperative and compliant behaviors in comparison to children from Western societies (Orlick, Zhou, & Partington, 1990; Rao & Stewart, 1999). Furthermore, aggressive behaviors are highly discouraged through emotional regulation socialization and behavioral discipline, resulting in Chinese children’s lower levels of overt aggression (e.g., physical and verbal aggression) in comparison to their Western counterparts (Bergeron & Schneider, 2005; Chen, 2010; Domino, 2000; Zhou et al., 2007). Although cross-cultural comparison is lacking in the current literature regarding relational aggression (e.g., social manipulation, gossip, exclusion), recent research shows that relational aggression is present in Chinese children and adolescents’ social behaviors (Li, Wang, Wang, & Shi, 2010; Li, Putallaz, & Su, 2011). Furthermore, Li et al.’s (2011) research shows that relational aggression is positively associated with an individualistic orientation and negatively associated with a collectivistic orientation among Chinese adolescents.

Several researchers (e.g., Chen, Rubin, & Li, 1995; Chen, Rubin, & Sun, 1992; Xu, Farver, Schwartz, & Chang, 2004) have investigated the behaviors related to social preference among Chinese children. However, to date, only one published study has examined popularity among Chinese children (Schwartz et al., 2010). These studies show that social preference and popularity are related to higher levels of prosocial behaviors, whereas popularity is also positively related to relational aggression. These findings suggest that high peer status (i.e., social preference, popularity) among Chinese children is associated with similar behavioral patterns as those found among North American children and adolescents. Similar to the literature on North American children and adolescents, little is known regarding how adolescents' goals to achieve a higher peer status relate to their social behaviors. Although cross-cultural similarities have been observed in behavioral correlates of peer status, Chinese adolescents holding higher social status goals, especially the social preference goal, may place more emphasis on prosocial behaviors and less on aggressive behaviors, given the cultural value and emphases on social harmony (Bond & Wang, 1983).

Social Status Goals and Behaviors

As a type of social cognition, social goals are the cognitive representations of desired outcomes in the social domain and are related to adolescents' behaviors (Crick, & Dodge, 1994; Jarvinen, & Nicholls, 1996). For example, conflict goals (e.g., revenge goals, dominance goals) are positively related to aggression, whereas affiliation goals (e.g., goals focused on working together) are negatively related to aggression among children and adolescents (Heidgerken, Hughes, Cavell, & Willson, 2004; Simon, Kobielski, & Martin, 2008). Because achieving higher peer status becomes increasingly important during adolescence (e.g., Parkhurst & Hopmeyer, 1998), adolescents may generate and pursue social goals regarding peer statuses, namely social status goals.

To our knowledge, little attention has been given to the relationship between adolescents' social status goals and their social behaviors. The desire for social preference and popularity are distinctive social status goals that are hypothesized to relate to different behavioral trajectories. In particular, adolescents desiring social preference (i.e., the social preference goal) are more likely to engage in prosocial behaviors to achieve more peer acceptance (Andreou, 2006; Parkhurst & Asher, 1992). However, adolescents desiring popularity (i.e., the popularity goal) may engage in both prosocial behaviors and relational aggression to achieve higher popularity status (Cillessen & Mayeux,

2004; Coie et al., 1990; Prinstein & Cillessen, 2003). Faris and Felmlee's (2011) analysis on social network centrality and adolescents' use of aggression shows that adolescents, except for those at the very bottom or the very top of the social hierarchy, are likely to act aggressively toward their peers to gain a higher peer status. At the same time, engaging in prosocial behaviors allows adolescents to be bistrategic (i.e., utilizing both prosocial behaviors and aggression) to effectively gain centrality and dominance over peers (Hawley, 2003). Through cultural socialization of behaviors (Chen, 2010; Chen & French, 2008), Chinese adolescents may emphasize prosocial behaviors in achieving higher peer statuses. In contrast, as a threat to harmonious interpersonal relations, overt aggression and relational aggression may be used markedly less by Chinese adolescents who desire a higher peer status (Bond & Wang, 1983; Schwartz et al., 2010).

Social Status Goals and Attributions for Relational Aggression

Past research has investigated the social cognitions of aggressive behaviors among children with high social preference. Crick and Ladd (1993) examined 3rd and 5th graders' attributions for peer conflict situations and they found that children with higher peer acceptance (i.e., social preference) used less self-serving attributions by evaluating these situations with mutual attributions (e.g., you and the other kid do not have fun together), whereas rejected children used hostile attributions (e.g., the other kid does not like many people). Given that well-liked children have less negative peer conflicts, they may feel less need to hold self-serving attributions (i.e., hostile attributions) to protect their well-being.

Due to limited research, the attribution styles of adolescents with popularity are unclear. Nevertheless, research examining aggressive children's attributions may shed light on this area, considering that relational aggression may be used to promote popularity (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004). Research shows that aggressive children attribute hostility to ambiguous peer provocations, which warrants, in their opinions, a retaliatory response, leading to aggressive behaviors (Crick, 1995; Crick & Dodge, 1996; Yoon et al., 2000). Adolescents who are perceived as popular may think about aggression in a self-serving manner to protect their sense of well-being and/or to show in-group favoritism toward peers who use relational aggression (Tajfel, Flament, Billig, & Bundy, 1971). The self-serving attributions about relational aggression may justify their current or future use of aggressive strategies to achieve their desired popularity status (Cillessen & Mayeux,

2004; Faris & Felmlee, 2011; Hawley, 2003). Supporting these speculations, Closson (2008) found that popular adolescents are more likely to use positive descriptors to describe popular peers, whereas unpopular adolescents are more likely to use negative ones. Furthermore, relational aggression as used by adolescents who are perceived as popular also serves the purpose to maintain their status and, as a result, such behaviors may seem self-serving or instrumental to maintaining one's peer status (Faris & Felmlee, 2011; Lease, Kennedy, & Axelrod, 2002). Similar patterns may be expected for adolescents who desire a higher popularity status. In contrast, because relational aggression is linked to peer rejection or low social preference, adolescents holding the social preference goal may be less likely to make positive attributions regarding such behaviors.

The Present Study

The present study investigates how social status goals (social preference goal and popularity goal) were related to aggressive and prosocial behaviors as well as attributions for relational aggression among a sample of Chinese adolescents. This non-Western sample will complement the current literature that is heavily based on North American populations. In the cross-cultural literature, the Chinese culture provides an informative contrast with the American culture (Triandis, 1989). Given that the population of China comprises one-fifth of the world's population, Chinese youth is a major cultural group in the world's youth population (China Population and Development Research Center, 2011). Therefore, this study will provide useful information to the literature on peer status in the non-Western cultural contexts. As suggested by the literature (e.g., Putallaz et al., 2007), adolescents' aggressive and prosocial behaviors were assessed by multiple informants, including self, teacher, and peers. Each informant source will provide unique and valid information regarding adolescents' behaviors. We expected a positive relationship between the popularity goal and relational aggression because adolescents who desire higher popularity may see relational aggression as an effective strategy to obtain popularity (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004; Faris & Felmlee, 2011; Prinstein & Cillessen, 2003; Rose et al., 2004; Schwartz et al., 2010). In addition, we expected a negative relationship between the social preference goal and aggressive behaviors as such behaviors are likely to reduce peer liking during adolescence (LaFontana & Cillessen, 2002). However, we expected both goals to negatively relate to overt aggression, as such behavior is not a positive contributor to peer status during adolescence (e.g., Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004) and is strongly discouraged among Chinese adolescents (Bond & Wang, 1983). In addition, as prosocial

behaviors are also endorsed by popular children (Hawley, 2003), and may be especially so in the Chinese culture (Chen, 2010), we expected such behaviors to positively relate to both the popularity goal and the social preference goal.

With regard to attributions for relational aggression, we expected that adolescents with a higher popularity goal would make more self-serving attributions in an attempt to justify relational aggression and to show in-group favoritism toward aggressors, making them feel more comfortable using relational aggression (Tajfel et al., 1971; Yoon et al., 2000). Such self-serving attributions may protect adolescents' well-being by reducing the distress because of cognitive dissonance between their attitude toward relational aggression and their engagement in it. In contrast, adolescents with a higher social preference goal may make more neutral, less self-serving attributions (e.g., attribute to the conflict between the victim and aggressor) for relational aggression, as they are unlikely to use relational aggression to achieve social preference and thus do not need to justify the use of such behaviors (Crick & Ladd, 1993).

Method

Participants

Participants were 477 (244 girls and 243 boys) 7th and 8th grade Chinese adolescents and 10 teachers at a public middle school in a major city in the Mideast of China with an average age of 13.42 years ($SD = .62$ years). The majority of the students' ethnicities was Han representing the provincial characteristics (>95%; Hubei Province Census Bureau, 2011). Students stay with the same group of classmates in their class throughout the 3 years in middle school (7th to 9th grades). The class size is relatively large (approximately 50 students per class) in comparison to American class sizes. The class size was not related to the variables investigated in the study. Participants were from lower middle class or working class families and most were from two-parent households (94%). Most parents had a high school education or lower (84% for mothers, 83% for fathers) whereas the rest received college- and graduate-level education.

Materials and Procedure

Information about the study was presented to adolescents as well as their teachers and parents through group meetings and letters. Adolescents and teachers were informed that their responses would be kept confidential and

that their participation was completely voluntary. Participating students obtained parental permission and gave assent before completing the questionnaires at a school session. Teachers also gave consent before completing the questionnaire. The questionnaires were translated into Chinese using the translation and back-translation technique by two researchers fluent in both English and Chinese.

Teacher reports of behaviors. Teachers reported adolescents' overt and relational aggression as well as prosocial behaviors using the Children's Social Behavior Scale—Teacher Form (CSBS-TF; Crick, 1996). This measure included seven relational aggression items (i.e., "This child tries to exclude certain peers from peer group activities," "This child spreads rumors or gossips about some peers," "When angry at a peer, this child tries to get other children to stop playing with the peer or to stop liking the peer," "When mad at a peer, this child ignores the peer or stops talking to the peer," "This child threatens to stop being a peer's friend to hurt the peer or to get what she or he wants from the peer," and "This child tries to exclude certain peers from peer group activities"), four overt aggression items (i.e., "This child hits, shoves, or pushes peers," "This child initiates or gets into physical fights with peers," "This child threatens to hit or to beat up other children," and "This child tries to dominate or bully peers"), and four prosocial behavior items (i.e., "This child says supportive things to peers," "This child tries to cheer up peers when they are sad or upset about something," "This child is helpful to others," and "This child is kind to peers"). In addition, two more items were added to the relational aggression subscale to capture the nonverbal aspect of this type of behavior (i.e., "This child rolls his/her eyes or snubs his/her nose to make others feel left out," and "This child makes mean faces to hurt others' feelings"; Underwood, Beron, Gentsch, Galperin, & Risser, 2008), bringing the relational aggression item total to nine. Teachers recorded their answers on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *never true of this child*, 5 = *always true of this child*). The Cronbach's alphas were .94, .92, and .93 for the teacher-rated relational aggression, overt aggression, and prosocial behaviors, respectively.

Peer nominations of behaviors. Peer nomination procedure was employed to assess adolescents' relational and overt aggression as well as prosocial behaviors using the items in the Children's Social Behavior Scale (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Adolescents nominated as many classmates as they wanted that fit each item. There were four relational aggression items (i.e., "When mad, gets even by keeping the person from being in their group of friends," "Tells friends they will stop liking them unless friends do what they say," "When mad at a person, ignores them or stops talking to them," and "Tries to keep a certain

person from being in their group during activity or play time”), three overt aggression items (i.e., “Yells, calls other mean names,” “Hits, pushes others,” and “Starts fights”), and four items assessing prosocial behaviors (i.e., “Does nice things for others,” “Helps others,” “Cheers up others,” “Good leader”). Following the literature (e.g., Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004; Prinstein & Cillessen, 2003; Rose et al., 2004), nominations for each item were aggregated and then standardized within class to create a z-score. The standardization of nominations within class was to control for class sizes that may affect the amount of nominations so that scores can be compared across classes (Coie, Dodge, & Coppotelli, 1982). The standardized scores were averaged to form a final score for each of three social behaviors separately. The Cronbach’s alphas for peer nominated relational aggression, overt aggression, and prosocial behaviors were .89, .92, and .78, respectively.

Self-reports of behaviors. The self-report measure of adolescent behaviors was adapted from the peer nomination measure (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). In this measure, five items assessed relational aggression (i.e., “How often do you keep a person out of a group because you are mad at him/her?” “How often do you ignore or stop talking to somebody when you are mad at him/her?” “How often do you say something bad about people behind their backs?” “How often do you tell a kid that he/she cannot play with the group?” and “How often do you tell others kids not to play with a certain kid?”), three items assessed overt aggression (i.e., “How often do you start fights with others?” “How often do you say mean things to other kids?” and “How often do you tell other kids that you will beat them up unless the kids do what you say?”), and one item assessed prosocial behaviors (i.e., “How often do you help, cooperate, or share with other kids?”). Adolescents answered each question on a 5-point Likert-type scale with 1 (*Never*) to 5 (*All the time*). The Cronbach’s alphas for the self-reported relational and overt aggression were .81 each.

Social status goals. Adolescents reported their social status goals through two items assessing the popularity goal (“I want to be popular among classmates”) and the social preference goal (“I want to be well liked by my classmates”), respectively. The two goal items directly corresponded to the peer nomination assessment of popularity (i.e., “unpopular/popular”; Parkhurst & Hopmeyer, 1998; Rose et al., 2004) and social preference (i.e., “like most/like least”; Coie et al., 1982). Participants rated the extent to which they agreed with each statement using a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). Popularity and social preference are moderately correlated, $r = .28$ (Parkhurst & Hopmeyer, 1998). This relationship indicates that the two forms of peer status are similar, but also distinctive

from one another. Correspondingly, the popularity goal and the social preference goal would also be distinctive forms of social status goals, but also moderately related ($r = .51$).

Attributions for relational aggression. Adolescents were given a description of typical relationally aggressive acts (e.g., ignoring someone when mad at the person, excluding someone from a group, saying mean things about others behind their back). Following this description, adolescents were asked to think about such events occurring in their school and to provide their understanding of the possible reasons that led to these behaviors (i.e., attribution) through an open-ended question. Based on adolescents' responses, a coding scheme was developed that contained 39 categories. Two coders independently coded participants' responses. The original categories were dummy coded (i.e., 0 and 1). If the response applied to a category, a one was given to that category; otherwise, it was a zero. The agreement between the two coders was high, 99%. The kappa for the two coders was adequate, .77, which indicates adequate agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977) and of acceptable standards in previously published articles (e.g., Craig, D'Mello, Witherspoon, & Graesser, 2008; Ives, Samuel, Psaty, & Kuller, 2009). All disagreements between the two coders were resolved by discussions among the coders and the second author. Based on the content meanings of the categories and theoretical considerations (e.g., Graham & Juvonen, 1998), we identified four major categories of attributions, which were obtained by combining or summing the related categories. The first attribution category was *aggressor blame*, which attributed relational aggression to the aggressor's problems (e.g., because the aggressor disliked the victim; because the aggressor was arrogant, self-centered, or impulsive; because the aggressor liked hurting others or wanted to sabotage them or get revenge). More than half of the sample (53%) made at least one aggressor-blame attribution. Although *aggressor's jealousy* regarding the victim (e.g., aggressor is jealous because victim is better than aggressor or better than others) was a type of aggressor blame, this category stands as a strong category that was highly mentioned (13% of the overall sample and 19% of those who made any attributions regarding the aggressors' characteristics). Therefore, the aggressor's jealousy category remained as a separate major category and the original dummy coding was retained. The third attribution category was *conflict* reflecting a relatively neutral attribution (e.g., conflict because of poor communication, misunderstanding, or disagreements) indicating that a problem between both the aggressor and victim might have led to relational aggression. Seventeen percent of the sample gave a conflict attribution. The fourth attribution category was *victim blame* (e.g., victims had a bad personality or character, lacked social skills, had poor appearance, were obnoxious). For this category, children attributed

Table 1. Correlations among Social Status Goals, Prosocial Behavior, and Aggression

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Popularity goal	—										
2. Social preference goal	.51**	—									
3. SR relational aggression	.15**	-.13**	—								
4. SR overt aggression	-.08	-.14**	.55***	—							
5. SR prosocial behaviors	.20**	.23**	-.19**	-.23***	—						
6. PN relational aggression	.01	-.03	.27***	.30***	.04	—					
7. PN overt aggression	-.05	-.03	.17***	.36***	-.07	.59***	—				
8. PN prosocial behaviors	.12*	.15**	-.12*	-.02	.16***	.05	.08	—			
9. TR relational aggression	.01	-.04	.21***	.26***	-.07	.28***	.31***	-.03	—		
10. TR overt aggression	-.05	-.05	.17***	.30***	-.06	.33***	.41***	-.06	.77***	—	
11. TR prosocial behaviors	.14**	.17**	-.12*	-.19***	.09	-.12**	-.20***	.18***	-.37***	-.38***	—

Note. SR = Self-reported; PN = Peer nominated; TR = Teacher-reported.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

relational aggression to the victims' characteristics that led the aggressor to use relational aggression against them. Approximately one-fourth of the sample (24%) made at least one victim-blame attribution.

Results

Associations between Social Status Goals and Behaviors

As the correlational results reveal (see Table 1), the popularity goal was positively related to self-reported relational aggression but not overt aggression, however the social preference goal was negatively related to both self-reported relational and overt aggression. No significant correlations were found between both goals and either type of aggression as reported by peers and teachers. Both the popularity and social preference goals were positively related to prosocial behaviors as reported by all three informant sources. The

Table 2. Regression Analysis Predicting Behaviors Using Social Status Goals

	Relational aggression			Overt aggression			Prosocial behaviors		
	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β
SR behaviors									
Gender	-.15	.07	-.10*	-.28	.06	-.23***	.07	.08	.04
Popularity goal	.08	.04	.10	.01	.03	.01	.09	.05	.10
Social preference goal	-.07	.05	-.10	-.08	.04	-.13*	.15	.05	.17**
R ²		.20**			.27**			.25**	
PN behaviors									
Gender	-1.02	.33	-.15**	-2.04	.24	-.38***	-.05	.29	-.12
Popularity goal	.04	.20	.01	-.07	.15	-.03	.17	.18	.06
Social preference goal	-.17	.20	-.05	-.07	.15	-.02	.39	.18	.13*
R ²		.15*			.28***			.16**	
TR behaviors									
Gender	-.37	.07	-.24***	-.42	.07	-.29***	2.60	.37	.32**
Popularity goal	.02	.04	.03	-.02	.04	-.02	.21	.23	.05
Social preference goal	-.03	.05	-.03	-.03	.05	-.03	.46	.22	.11*
R ²		.25***			.30**			.37**	

Note. SR = Self-reported; PN = Peer nominated; TR = Teacher-reported.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

two goals were moderately and positively correlated, suggesting adolescents may endorse dual social status goals.

To examine the unique association of each goal with aggressive and prosocial behaviors, multiple regressions (see Table 2) were conducted with popularity and social preference goals as the independent variables and gender as a covariate (*boy* = 0, *girl* = 1). Dependent variables were both types of aggression and prosocial behaviors across all three informants (self, teacher, and peer). Interaction terms between gender and either goal were not significant in all models and consequently were excluded from the final analysis and report. We examined the variance inflation factor (VIF) to check for multicollinearity and found that the VIF was between 1.006 and 1.009 for the popularity goal and the social preference goal, respectively, indicating that multicollinearity was not a problem because VIF did not exceed the 5 to 10 rule of thumb (Gordon, 1968; Schroeder, 1990). As Table 2 shows, Chinese adolescent boys were more overtly aggressive and relationally aggressive than girls across all informants, whereas girls were reported by their teacher

Table 3. Regression Analysis Predicting Attributions for Relational Aggression Using Gender and Social Status Goals

Predictor	Aggressor Blame		Conflict		Victim Blame		Aggressor's Jealousy	
	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI
Gender	1.14	[1.02, 1.27]	1.28	[1.04, 1.52]	.76	[.59, .93]	1.03	[.59, 1.81]
Popularity goal	.83*	[.76, .90]	1.03	[.88, 1.18]	1.03	[.93, 1.13]	.66*	[.48, .90]
Social preference goal	1.19*	[1.11, 1.27]	1.48*	[1.31, 1.65]	1.16	[1.05, 1.27]	1.68*	[1.16, 2.43]
χ^2	8.37*		10.69*		4.55		9.90*	
Df	3		3		3		3	

Note. OR = odds ratio; CI = confidence interval. Poisson regressions were conducted for aggressor blame, conflict, and victim blame, whereas a logistic regression was conducted for the aggressor's jealousy category. * $p < .05$.

as more prosocial than boys. After controlling for the social preference goal and gender, the popularity goal was no longer significantly related to relational aggression, overt aggression, and prosocial behaviors as reported by any informant. Although controlling for the popularity goal and gender, the social preference goal was still negatively related to self-reported overt aggression, $\beta = -.13$, $p < .05$, but positively related to prosocial behaviors for all informants, $\beta = .17$, $p < .01$ for self-report, $\beta = .13$, $p < .05$ for peer nominations, and $\beta = .11$, $p < .05$ for teacher report.

Associations Between Social Status Goals and Attributions

To examine how the popularity and the social preference goals were related to adolescents' attributions for relational aggression, Poisson and logistic regression analyses were conducted (see Table 3). Poisson regression was used for three dependent variables (aggressor blame, conflict, victim blame) because each dependent variable consisted of count data (e.g., 0s, 1s, 2s) as a result of combined attribution coding categories (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003; Cox, West, & Aiken, 2009). Logistic regression was used for the dependent variable of aggressor's jealousy attribution because this category remained as the original dichotomous category (0, 1). Predictors included gender, the popularity goal, and the social preference goal. We examined gender by social status goal interactions, which resulted in nonsignificance. Therefore, only the models with main effects are reported. Poisson and logistic regression coefficients can be interpreted as the change in the log of the expected count as a function of the predictor variables. For these

regression analyses, the odds ratio is interpreted (Cohen et al., 2003). That is, with one unit change in the popularity goal or the social preference goal, the log of expected counts is expected to change by the odds ratio while holding other variables constant. These changes can also be interpreted as increases or decreases in the likelihood that an adolescent with the popularity or the social preference goal would make an attribution for relational aggression.

The overall Poisson regression analysis was significant for aggressor-blame attribution, $\chi^2 (df = 3) = 8.37, p < .05$, and conflict, $\chi^2 (df = 3) = 10.69, p < .05$. For one point increase in the popularity goal, the odds that the adolescent endorsed aggressor-blame attributions would decrease by .83, 95% CI [.76, .90], $p < .05$. In contrast, with one point increase in the social preference goal, the odds that the adolescent endorsed aggressor-blame attributions would increase by 1.19, 95% CI [1.11, 1.27], $p < .05$. For the conflict attribution, only the social preference goal was a significant predictor. With one point increase in the social preference goal, the odds that the adolescent endorsed conflict attributions would increase by 1.48, 95% CI [1.31, 1.65], $p < .05$. The Poisson regression with the victim-blame attribution as the dependent variable was not significant. Using logistic regression, the overall model for predicting aggressor's jealousy from both social status goals was significant, $\chi^2 (df = 3) = 9.90, p < .05$. Specifically, with one point increase in popularity goal, the odds that adolescents endorsed the aggressor's jealousy attribution would decrease by .66, 95% CI [.48, .90], $p < .05$. For one point increase in the social preference goal, the odds the adolescent endorsed the aggressor's jealousy attribution would increase by 1.68, 95% CI [1.16, 2.43], $p < .05$. Gender was not a significant predictor of any of the attribution variables.

Discussion

This study examined Chinese adolescents' social status goals in relation to their social behaviors and their attributions for relational aggression. Consistent with the Chinese cultural emphases on prosocial behaviors, social harmony, and interrelatedness, the social preference goal showed more unique associations with adolescents' behaviors in comparison to the popularity goal. Furthermore, the two social status goals related to unique patterns of attributions for relational aggression. The more adolescents endorsed the popularity goal, the less likely they attributed relational aggression to the aggressors' negative characteristics (e.g., jealousy, mean). In contrast, the more adolescents endorsed the social preference goal, the more likely they would attribute relational aggression to the aggressors' negative characteristics as well as neutral reasons (e.g., conflict between the aggressor and victim). These find-

ings contribute to our knowledge regarding adolescents' pursuit of higher peer status and their behavioral and attribution patterns.

Social Status Goals and Social Behaviors

The results provide partial support for our hypotheses regarding the associations between social status goals and aggressive behaviors. Our study shows that the two goals were moderately correlated; indicating that these goals share commonality but were also unique and that Chinese adolescents may endorse both goals. Although controlling for each other, the social preference goal was negatively related to self-reported overt aggression, whereas the popularity goal was not uniquely related to any aggressive behaviors. Chinese culture emphasizes social harmony and suppresses overt aggression (Bond & Wang, 1983). Consequently, Chinese adolescents are less likely to use aggressive strategies to gain social status. The current findings are in line with previous findings showing a negative link between social preference and overt aggression among both Chinese children (Chen et al., 1992) and American adolescents (Prinstein & Cillessen, 2003). Although there is little social status goal research conducted among Westerners, the current findings on social preference goal are likely to be extended to Western adolescents given the consistent findings regarding social preference and aggression across cultures. We found no relationship between social status goals and both types of aggression as reported by teachers and peers. Although informants diverged on their reports of adolescents' aggressive behaviors, it is important to consider different informants because each source can only observe one aspect, but a valid aspect, of a child's behavior (Putallaz et al., 2007).

After controlling for each other, adolescents with the social preference goal were more likely to be prosocial as indicated by all three informant sources, highlighting the cultural emphasis on the prosocial development among Chinese children (Chen, 2010) and the importance of prosocial behaviors in Chinese adolescents' construction of peer status. These findings are also consistent with previous research that found a positive association between social preference and prosocial behaviors among Chinese children (Chen et al., 1992) and American adolescents (Prinstein, 2007), the latter of which suggests that similar findings may be observed among American adolescents.

We found no unique associations between popularity goal and any type of social behaviors after controlling for social preference goal. Even though adolescents' popularity status relate to aggressive and prosocial behaviors, the current finding suggests that such behaviors may not be actively used by Chinese adolescents who hold the popularity goal. It's possible that the popularity goal

may be less important to Chinese adolescents' social status development. As interrelatedness is highly valued in the Chinese culture (Wong, Tinsley, Law, & Mobley, 2003), Chinese adolescents' goal for social status may be more concerned with being accepted by peers (i.e., social preference) than having a high popularity status. In contrast, given the importance of popularity among Western adolescents (Eder, 1985), having a popularity goal may be especially important for American adolescents, which invites future investigation.

Social Status Goals and Attributions for Relational Aggression

Our findings on Chinese adolescents' attributional patterns provide useful information to the literature, considering little research has been conducted on these processes in non-Western adolescents. Consistent with our expectations, we found evidence for the differential endorsement of attributions for relational aggression among adolescents with different social status goals. Specifically, adolescents desiring peer liking (the social preference goal) tended to believe relational aggression occurred because of the aggressor's negative characteristics, aggressor's jealousy, or neutral reasons, such as conflict. In contrast, adolescents holding the popularity goal were less likely to blame the aggressor's characteristics or the aggressor's jealousy for inflicting relational aggression.

As relational aggression has been shown to positively predict popularity (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004; Prinstein & Cillessen, 2003), Chinese adolescents endorsing the popularity goal may be inclined to justify using relational aggression as a strategy to promote peer status. Such a strategy may make it easier for them to engage in relational aggression at a later time (Crick & Ladd, 1993; Hawley, 2003; Yoon et al., 2000). These self-serving attributions may protect these adolescents' well-being by reducing cognitive dissonance between their attitude toward relational aggression and their usage of such behaviors. Such attributions indicate in-group favoritism for those adolescents who engage in relational aggression (Tajfel et al., 1971). These findings may be likely extended to American adolescents because previous research has shown cross-cultural similarities in self-evaluative processes, such as having self-serving attributional biases, between East Asians and Westerners (Brown, 2010). However, adolescents with the social preference goal are generally less relationally aggressive, are unlikely to see relational aggression as a strategy to promote peer liking, and do not show in-group favoritism toward relational aggressors.

Furthermore, we found that none of the social status goals was related to victim-blame attributions. Victim blame is typically associated with frequent victimization (Dodge et al., 2003; Graham & Juvonen, 1998). We did not expect that adolescents with any one social status goal would be frequent victims of relational aggression (de Bruyn, Cillessen, & Wissink, 2010) and, therefore, there may not be a significant pattern between the two goals and victim-blame attributions.

Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations of this study should be noted along with future directions. Our study is an initial investigation of social status goals, which were directly matched with the method assessing social preference and perceived popularity (Coie et al., 1982; Parkhurst & Hopmeyer, 1998; Rose et al., 2004). However, this assessment may seem somewhat simplified, even though the two goals demonstrated adequate convergent and discernment validities. Future research may include more items to furthermore examine the measurement of the two goal constructs. In addition, the current cross-sectional design does not allow us to examine the directions of influence between social status goals and behaviors. Future longitudinal studies are needed to examine the direction of and changes in associations between social status goals and behaviors as well as the possible mediation of attributions between them. In these longitudinal studies, it is important to control for adolescents' baseline behaviors, particularly aggressive/delinquent behaviors, because such behaviors highly predict later behavioral development (Fite, Goodnight, Bates, Dodge, & Pettit, 2008). This control will allow for a clear delineation of the effects of social status goals on adolescents' behavioral changes beyond their initial behaviors. Another major limitation of this study is that we did not control for adolescents' actual peer statuses (i.e., social preference, popularity). Although theoretically adolescents may endorse higher social status goals irrespective of their current statuses, their relationships should be empirically examined. Furthermore, given the strong associations between actual peer statuses and adolescent behaviors (e.g., Andreou, 2006; Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004; Prinstein & Cillessen, 2003), actual peer statuses should be controlled in future investigations to examine the unique and additional effects of social status goals on adolescent behaviors. Finally, we only examined attributions for relational aggression. Additional future research can also include other social cognitive variables, such as outcome expectancies and normative beliefs, and expand the social behaviors to gain a better understanding about how social status goals relate to adolescents' social cognitive processes.

In summary, this study reveals that Chinese adolescents' desires for higher social status relate to their current social behaviors and their attributions for relational aggression. More importantly, two social status goals, the social preference goal and the popularity goal, showed different patterns of associations with aggressive and prosocial behaviors as well as with adolescents' attributions regarding relational aggression. The findings of this study contribute to the literature by investigating social cognitive processes relating to peer status among adolescents and call for additional research on peer status in non-Western cultures. Furthermore, findings from this study may inform policy-making processes regarding the implications of peer status and aggressive behaviors in diverse cultural contexts.

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