Adolescents' Social Status Goals:

Relationships to Social Status Insecurity, Aggression, and Prosocial Behavior

Abstract

Peer status is an important aspect of adolescents’ social lives and is pursued actively by them. Although extensive research has examined how social behaviors are related to peer status (e.g., social preference, popularity), little attention has been given to adolescents’ social goals to obtain a desired peer status. Thus, this study examined two types of social status goals, popularity goal and social preference goal, and their relationships to social status insecurity and social behaviors among 405 ethnically diverse early adolescents (267 girls; *M* age = 12.92 years; age range = 11-15 years). After accounting for adolescents’ attained peer statuses (popularity and social preference), both social status goals were related distinctly to aggressive and prosocial behaviors as measured by self reports and peer nominations. Specifically, higher endorsement of the popularity goal was related to more self-reported relational aggression, but less peer-nominated prosocial behavior. In contrast, higher endorsement of the social preference goal was linked to less self-reported overt and relational aggression, but more self-reported and peer-nominated prosocial behavior. In addition, this study reveals that adolescents’ social status insecurity was related positively to both social status goals and had an indirect effect on adolescents’ social behaviors through the mediation of popularity goal endorsement. There were variations in goal endorsement as shown by groups of adolescents endorsing different levels of each goal. The group comparison results on social behaviors were largely consistent with the correlational findings. This study provides new insights into adolescents’ social cognitive processes about peer status and the implications of the two social status goals on adolescents’ behavioral development.

*Keywords: Social status goal, peer status, popularity, social preference, social status insecurity, aggression, prosocial behavior, social cognition*

**Introduction**

Social goals are an important part of adolescents’ social cognition as indicated by the links between adolescents’ social goals and their behaviors and adjustment issues, including aggression, depression, delinquency, and substance use (Lochman, Wayland, & White, 1993; Samson, Ojanen, & Hollo, 2012). As adolescents pay increasing attention to their social standing among their peers, they become highly motivated to pursue peer status (Levy, Kaplan, & Patrick, 2004; Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 2006). Consequently, substantial changes in peer status take place during early adolescence (Bowker, Rubin, Buskirk-Cohen, Rose-Krasnor, & Booth-LaForce, 2010). Despite the acknowledgement of the importance of peer status in adolescents’ social life, limited research attention has been given to the goal-oriented pursuit of peer status (i.e., social status goals).

As the two main dimensions of peer status, popularity and social preference are increasingly differentiated during adolescence (Cillessen & Marks, 2011; Parkhurst & Hopmeyer, 1998). A few studies have explored adolescents’ social goals pertinent to popularity (Jarvinen & Nicholls, 1996; Ryan, Hicks, & Midgley, 1997). However, few studies have differentiated social goals that separately address popularity and social preference (i.e., popularity goal, social preference goal). In addition, research has shown that adolescents’ popularity and social preference are highly related to their aggressive and prosocial behaviors (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004; Rose, Swenson, & Waller, 2004). A clear delineation of unique associations between social status goals and behaviors among adolescents while accounting for their attained peer statuses is necessary to give researchers a more in-depth view of the implications of social status goals for adolescents’ behavioral development (Wright, Li, & Shi, 2012). Furthermore, the current literature lacks critical information with regard to what processes are linked to adolescents’ formation of social status goals. We propose that adolescents’ feeling of insecurity about their peer status (i.e., social status insecurity) may be related to their endorsement of social status goals. This study will address these important issues by exploring how adolescents endorse social preference goals and popularity goals as well as how such endorsement is related to their social status insecurity and social behaviors. Findings of this study will enhance our understanding of adolescents’ social cognitive processes regarding peer status.

**Peer status and social behavior**

With a long-standing research history, social preference (i.e., social acceptance or peer liking) has been examined as one important dimension of peer status and typically is assessed by how much a child is liked by peers using the “like most/least” peer nominations (Bukowski, 2011; Coie, Dodge, & Coppotelli, 1982). Children with higher social preference are more prosocial, academically competent, and sociable, but less aggressive (e.g., LaFontana & Cillessen, 2002; Lease, Kennedy, & Axelrod, 2002; Parkhust & Hopmeyer, 1998). Relatively more recent research has revealed a different profile of high peer status known as popularity, which is characterized by social prestige, social power, and social visibility and is measured by the “who is popular/unpopular” peer nominations (Cillessen & Marks, 2011). Popular adolescents possess both positive characteristics (e.g., being socially central and prosocial) and negative characteristics (e.g., being aggressive and antisocial), especially during adolescence (e.g., Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004; Prinstein & Cillessen, 2003; Rose et al., 2004). In particular, studies have shown that the use of relational aggression relates positively to adolescents’ popularity, while overt aggression is not related significantly or related negatively to adolescents’ popularity (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004; Rose et al., 2004). In addition to relational aggression, popular adolescents may be bistrategic and use prosocial behaviors as well to gain more effective control of resources and to have a higher popularity status (Hawley, 2003). Social preference and popularity are correlated positively; however, the association becomes weaker during adolescence in comparison to middle childhood, indicating an increasing divergence of the two types of peer status among adolescents (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004; Prinstein & Cillessen, 2003). Even though we have gained substantial knowledge about how closely these two types of peer status are linked to social behaviors, little is known about how adolescents cognitively process peer status, for instance, whether adolescents form social goals to attain a desired peer status and whether these goals are related to their behaviors above and beyond their current peer status.

**Social status goals**

Goals are mental representations of desired outcomes (Aarts, 2012). Adolescents may form social goals for what they want to attain in different domains of development (Covington, 2000; Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Ojanen et al., 2005). These social goals involve desired end-state outcomes and direct behaviors, evaluations, and emotions (Fishbach & Ferguson, 2007). Significant to adolescents’ social lives, being accepted by peers provides them a sense of belonging, while having a popular status is an important part of the individual-group social process (Bukowski, 2011). Given their important role in peer interactions, both social preference and popularity are often highly desired and actively pursued by adolescents (Rubin et al., 2006). Such pursuit may be guided by adolescents’ goals for a desired peer status (Levy et al., 2004; Sijtsema et al., 2009). We define the social goals for attaining a desired peer status (e.g., social preference, popularity) as social status goals. Limited research examining social status goals among adolescents is available in the literature. A few studies have investigated adolescents’ social goals for popularity, generally characterized by visibility and prestige, in relationship to their social and academic adjustment (Kiefer & Ryan, 2008; Jarvinen & Nicholls, 1996; Ryan et al., 1997). For example, Jarvinen & Nicholls (1996) found that adolescents’ popularity goal was related positively to their social satisfaction; Ryan and colleagues (1997) found that popularity goals were related to avoiding help-seeking in the academic domain among elementary school students. Therefore, there is some evidence that adolescents’ social status goals have implications for their development. A close examination of previous studies, however, indicates that the operational definitions of popularity goals vary among studies. Some popularity goal measures include items reflecting both popularity and peer liking (e.g., Kiefer & Ryan, 2008; Jarvinen & Nicholls, 1996), while others examine adolescents’ desire of being included in a popular group at school (Ryan et al., 1997). There are also a few studies that have assessed a general social status goal without explicitly addressing whether it was a popularity goal or a social preference goal (e.g., Levy et al., 2004; Sijtsema et al., 2009). Given the scarcity of research and mixed measurement strategies to address social status goals, an effort to assess adolescents’ social status goals consistent with the current peer status literature is greatly needed. In particular, considering the clear divergence between social preference and popularity during adolescence (Cillessen & Marks, 2011), it becomes necessary to distinguish both types of social status goals, each directly addressing a distinct type of peer status.

To our knowledge, only one published study (i.e., Wright et al., 2012) has differentiated both types of social status goals, popularity goal and social preference goal, using a sample of Chinese adolescents. Findings of that study support the view that adolescents may endorse different status goals. However, this study used a single item, although very central to the construct, to measure each status goal. A further developed measure with multiple items that reflect better validity and reliability for both social status goals is greatly needed. Furthermore, little research has examined the heterogeneity of social status goal endorsement. Along with the increasingly differentiated peer statuses (i.e., social preference and popularity) during adolescence, it is possible that adolescents may endorse social status goals for either type of peer status or both depending on which type of peer status they value. This study takes the opportunity to explore this topic by examining different goal endorsement groups.

**Social status goals and behaviors**

There is an extensive body of literature that examines how goals regulate and direct behaviors (for a review, see Aarts, 2012). Goals sought by individuals give purpose and direction to actions and provide a framework for interpreting and responding to events (Covington, 2000; Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Goals are associated closely with behaviors such that they motivate individuals and guide behaviors as a means to reach the desired state that is set in goals (Fishbach & Ferguson, 2007). Research has shown that children’s social goals relate to specific behavioral patterns and behavioral responses to social situations (e.g., Lochman et al., 1993; Ryan & Shim, 2008; Rudolph, Abaied, Flynn, Sugimura, & Agoston, 2011). For example, early adolescents’ agentic goals (emphasizing power, status, and dominance) are related positively to their use of aggression and bullying, but related negatively to prosocial behaviors (Caravita& Cillessen, 2012; Ojanen, Gronroos, & Salmivalli, 2005). In conflict situations, children’s choice of response strategies corresponds to their social goals (Chung & Asher, 1996; Rose & Asher, 1999). Children with increasing endorsement of revenge goals over time are more likely to use aggression to gain rewards (McDonald & Lochman, 2012). Similarly, social information processing research has shown that children may select certain social goals (e.g., retaliation goals) before enacting behavioral responses, such as aggression (Crick & Dodge, 1994). A recent meta-analysis summarizes that youths’ prosocial goals are related negatively to aggression, whereas antisocial goals are related positively to aggression (Samson et al., 2012). These studies clearly demonstrate close associations between social goals and behavioral strategies that children and adolescents may use.

Furthermore, recent research suggests that children’s social cognitions about peer status are often congruent with their behavioral characteristics (Li, Xie, & Shi, 2012). For instance, aggressive children are more likely to perceive antisocial behaviors as determinant factors for popularity, whereas prosocial children are more likely to endorse prosocial determinants. Relating to social goals, previous research has revealed that children who believe aggression is legitimate are more likely to have higher ratings of retaliation goals (Erdley & Asher, 1999). As consistent findings have shown that adolescents’ use of relational aggression relates to their popularity (e.g., Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004; Rose et al., 2004), it is reasonable to expect that adolescents may have a stronger legitimacy belief for using relational aggression when they hold a higher popularity goal and, as a result, use more relational aggression. Meanwhile, adolescents may use prosocial behavior to gain popularity as well (Hawley, 2003), which may lead to a positive association between popularity goals and prosocial behavior. When children transition into early adolescence, however, overt aggression becomes non-significantly or negatively related to popularity (e.g., Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004). This may lead to the belief of decreased legitimacy of using overt aggression, resulting in a non-significant or negative association between popularity goals and overt aggression. In contrast, abundant research findings have shown that adolescents’ social preference is related positively to prosocial behaviors, but related negatively to both forms of aggression (Rubin et al., 2006). Adolescents with higher social preference goals may see a higher legitimacy of using prosocial behaviors, but not aggression, resulting in more use of prosocial behaviors, but less use of both forms of aggression.

Although limited empirical research has examined the above propositions, available findings largely support them. Wright and colleagues (2012) found that Chinese adolescents’ popularity goal was correlated positively with self-reported relational aggression and prosocial behaviors as reported by self, peers, and teachers. In contrast, the social preference goal was correlated negatively with self-reported relational and overt aggression, but correlated positively with prosocial behaviors as reported by all three informant sources. Although this study made a meaningful initiation in this research area, it did not control for adolescents’ attained peer statuses (i.e., popularity and social preference), which are highly related to social behaviors (e.g., Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004). Although social status goals may be related weakly to attained statuses because adolescents with any status may desire a higher status, the unique effects of these two goals on behaviors will be further clarified if the attained statuses are accounted for.

Previous research has shown that boys and girls endorsed similar levels of popularity goals and general status goals (Jarvinen & Nichols, 1996; Sijtsema et al., 2009). However, as girls endorse more relationship maintenance and communal goals (Ojanen et al., 2005; Rose & Asher, 1999), they may be more likely to endorse the social preference goals than boys. Despite this potential gender difference in goal endorsement, Wright et al.’s (2012) findings show that gender did not moderate the relationship between these goals (i.e., popularity goal, social preference goal) and adolescents’ overt aggression, relational aggression, and prosocial behaviors. This is consistent with other social goal research. For example, Heidgerken and colleagues (2004) found that gender did not moderate the relationships between children’s social goals (i.e., dominance, revenge, affiliation) and aggression. These results suggest that gender may not moderate the associations between these goals and social behaviors.

**Social status insecurity and goals**

Past research has shown several social cognitive processes that may contribute to the development of social goals, such as beliefs about peer interactions (Jarvinen & Nicholls, 1996), theories about intelligence and peer relations (Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Rudolph, 2010), and the processing of social information (Crick & Dodge, 1994). In particular, how adolescents perceive themselves (e.g., self perception, self-efficacy) explains substantial variations in social goals (e.g., Erdley & Asher, 1996; Ojanen, Aunola, & Salmivalli, 2007; Salmivalli, Ojanen, Haanpää, & Peets, 2005). For example, the education literature suggests that students’ need for achievement and fear of failure are both related to their endorsement of achievement goals (Elliot & Murayama, 2008). Similarly, social development research shows that children’s secure schema characterized by positive perceptions of self and peers is related to their endorsement of communal goals emphasizing relationships with others (Salmivalli et al., 2009). As competing for peer status becomes intense during adolescence (LaFontana & Cillessen, 2002), adolescents may develop increasing concerns or insecure feelings about their social standing among peers (i.e., social status insecurity). For example, they may feel their status in the class is not as high as they want or feel their status is threatened by others. Such insecure feelings may be present among any adolescent. Even when adolescents’ status is fairly high, they may encounter peers’ competition for popularity or peer liking, and thus they may feel insecure about their status.

Adolescents who are concerned about their social status may use aggressive strategies to defend or promote their status (Sijtsema et al., 2009). Supporting this view, research has shown that adolescents’ social status insecurity was related positively to their use of overt and relational aggression (Li, Wang, Wang, & Shi, 2010). Aggression, particularly relational aggression, is an effective strategy that adolescents may use to gain influence and to achieve their desired popularity status (Adler & Adler, 1995; LaFontana & Cillessen, 2002). Consistently, research on related topics has shown that children who are over-sensitive or pessimistic about peer status are more likely to aggress against peers (Downey, Lebolt, Rincon, & Freitas, 1998; Sandstrom & Herlan, 2007). Extrapolating to the current research, social status insecurity is likely to relate to adolescents’ aggression. Furthermore, adolescents’ insecure feelings about their social status among peers may motivate them to set goals to attain a desired peer status (Elliot & Murayama, 2008; Salmivalli et al., 2009). Social status goals, in turn, are related to behavioral strategies to achieve these goals. Therefore, social status insecurity may have an indirect effect on social behaviors mediated by adolescents’ social status goals.

**The Present Study**

Extending previous research on social goals regarding adolescents’ peer status, this research aims to investigate two types of social status goals directly addressing popularity and social preference. Based on prior research (Wright et al., 2012), we will develop a new social status goal measure to examine how these goals are related uniquely to adolescents’ aggressive and prosocial behaviors. Specifically, adolescents’ popularity goal is expected to be related positively to relational aggression and prosocial behaviors, but not related to or related negatively to overt aggression. As for the social preference goal, it is expected to be related negatively to both relational and overt aggression, but related positively to prosocial behaviors. Because adolescents’ attained peer statuses account for variations in their behaviors, we will control for their popularity and social preference to obtain a clear delineation of the above hypothesized associations. Furthermore, we will examine a potential correlate of social status goals, social status insecurity, to help understand the pertinent cognitive process for these goals. As suggested by previous research (Li et al., 2010), social status insecurity is likely related to social behaviors, such as overt and relational aggression. These associations may be manifested by indirect pathways through the mediation of social status goals because adolescents who are insecure about their status are more likely to set social status goals and use behavioral strategies to achieve these goals. Therefore, we expect that social status insecurity may have positive indirect associations with relational aggression and prosocial behaviors mediated by the popularity goal, while having negative indirect associations with both forms of aggression and a positive indirect association with prosocial behaviors mediated by the social preference goal.

A secondary research aim for this study is to explore the heterogeneity of social status goal endorsement. Even though popularity becomes an important dimension in peer interactions during adolescence, some adolescents may still desire social preference or both. It is also reasonable to expect that there may be some adolescents who may not desire high peer status. Thus, this study examines groups of adolescents who endorse mainly popularity goals, mainly social preference goals, or both and makes comparisons among them and with groups endorsing average or low levels of both goals on social status insecurity and behaviors. Due to limited prior research, this research aim is exploratory and thus no hypothesis is proposed,

Since gender is not expected to moderate the relationship between social status goals and social behaviors (Wright et al., 2012), it will not be included as a moderator in the examination. Following the literature (e.g., Ojanen et al., 2005), potential gender effects on social behaviors and social status goals will be accounted for by including gender as a covariate to allow a clearer examination of the associations between social status goals and behaviors. To lessen some of the concerns regarding shared-method variance, we will employ two informant sources to report adolescent behaviors, self-reports and peer nominations, each of which provides a valid and unique assessment of social behaviors (Putallaz et al., 2007).

**Methods**

**Participants**

The participants were 405 adolescents (267 girls) in 6th, 7th, and 8th grades from two suburban Midwestern and two suburban Southeastern middle schools, with an average age of 12.92 years (*SD* = .87). All four schools had between 500 and 600 students in grades 6 through 8 and the number of participating students from each school was similar (around 90 to 105 students each). The majority of the adolescents self identified as White (48.5%), followed by Hispanic (36.4%), African American (11%), Asian (3.6%), and other (0.5%). The frequency of gender and ethnicity are reflective of the background of each school. According to neighborhood demographics, families from the schools had similar SES, which ranged from low SES to middle class. As reported by adolescents, the majority of their mothers (35.1%) and fathers (35.5%) had a college education (at least an Associate’s degree), followed by 19.7% of mothers and 19% of fathers who had completed some college. The rest of the parents had a high school education (30.7% of mothers; 32.3% of fathers) or had not completed high school (11.9% of mothers; 13.3% of fathers).

**Procedure**

After the researchers received IRB approval from the university, emails were sent to school principals to introduce them to the study. After they agreed to have their school participate, a brief classroom announcement was made and parental permission slips were passed out to adolescents. The majority of adolescents (86%) returned a parental permission slip and 74% were given parental permission. Of these adolescents with parental permission, 100% participated in the study. Surveys were administered to those adolescents who had parent permission. Before taking the surveys, adolescents were verbally informed of their rights as participants. They were given an assent document in order to read more details about the study and to indicate their permission to participate in the study. There were no adolescents who declined to participate. To conduct the peer nominations for behavioral and status assessment, adolescents were given a classroom roster with all students’ names in the participants’ grade that were organized in alphabetical order by first name and each preceded by a unique code number. Each roster included 175 to 225 student names. The names listed on the roster included all students within that grade. Participants wrote the ID of peers whom they believed fit each behavioral description. They could nominate as many peers as they wanted within their grade and cross-gender nominations were allowed, both of which are highly recommended procedures in the literature (Cillessen & Marks, 2011). Peer-nominations are standardized in order to control for grade sizes that may affect the amount of nominations, which allows researchers to compare nominations across grades and schools (Coie, Dodge, & Coppotelli, 1982).

**Measures**

**Peer-nominated aggressive and prosocial behaviors.** This measure assessed peer-nominated relational aggression, overt aggression, and prosocial behaviors (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Relational aggression (e.g., “peers who when mad, get even by keeping the person from being in their group of friends”) was assessed by four items, overt aggression by three items (e.g., “peers who start fights”), and prosocial behaviors by four items (e.g., “peers who do nice things for others”). All nominations were tallied and then standardized within grade and school. Items within the same construct were averaged. Cronbach’s alphas were .85 for relational aggression, .84 for overt aggression, and .73 for prosocial behaviors.

**Social preference and popularity.** Participants nominated peers whom they believed fit the description of “peers you like most” and “peers you like least” for social preference (Coie et al., 1982) as well as their peers who fit the description of “peers who are popular” and “peers who are unpopular” for popularity (Mayeux & Cillessen, 2008). To calculate social preference, the standardized “like least” item was subtracted from the standardized “like most” item. The subtraction scores were then restandardized by grade and school to form the social preference score. Similarly, for popularity, the standardized “unpopular” item was subtracted from the standardized “popular” item, followed by a restandardization of the subtraction scores by grade and school to form the popularity score.

**Social status goals.** Extending the social status goal measure used in Wright et al. (2012), several more coherent items conceptually representing the popularity goal and the social preference goal were created for this study (see Table 1). Specifically, six items measured popularity goals (e.g., “I want to be popular among my peers”) and five items measured social preference goals (e.g., “I want to be well-liked by my peers”). Adolescents indicated how often they thought about the situation described in each statement on a Likert Scale of 1 (*Never*) to 5 (*All the time*). Because the two goals are positively correlated as shown by the literature (Wright et al., 2012), an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted as well as a model comparison between a one-goal model and a two-goal model using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to examine whether the two goals should be kept separate. Principal axis factoring in EFA (Pett, Lackey, & Sullivan, 2003) was used to explore the factor solution among the eleven items. Both the variances explained (two factors explain more than 5% of the common variance; the accumulative variance explained by these two factors was 48%) and the pattern of the scree plot recommended a two-factor solution. Based on the theoretical conceptualization of items for the two goals, a two-goal CFA was run and demonstrated adequate model fit (*χ*2 = 108.16, *df* = 42, *p* < .001, *CFI* = .94, *TLI* = .92, *RMSEA* =.07, *SRMR* = .05). In contrast, the one-goal (combined items for the two goals) CFA did not fit the data as well (*χ*2 = 155.21, *df* = 43, *p* < .001, *CFI* = .90, *TLI* = .87, *RMSEA* =.10, *SRMR* = .06). A model comparison between these two models showed a significant decrease in model fit, Δχ2 = 47.05, Δ*df* = 1, *p* < .001, indicating that the two-goal model fit the data significantly better. Therefore, the proposed two goals were kept in the analyses. Cronbach’s alphas were acceptable for both goals (α = .83 for the popularity goal; α = .73 for the social preference goal).

**Social status insecurity**. Adolescents answered six questions (see Table 1) about their feelings of insecurity regarding their social status and social standing (e.g., “I worry that my peers don’t like me,” “I feel that my status among my peers is not high,” “I worry about my popularity among my peers”) on a scale of 1 (*Never*) to 5 (*All the time*) (Li et al., 2010). Cronbach’s alpha was acceptable (α = .85) for this construct. An EFA with Principal axis factoring was conducted (Pett et al, 2003). Both the variance explained (52%) and the pattern of the scree plot recommended a single factor solution. The measurement results indicate adequate factor loadings (see Table 1).

**Self-reported aggression and prosocial behaviors.** This measure was adapted from the peer-nominations of aggressive and prosocial behaviors (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). The original items were reworded to ask adolescents about their own behaviors, rather than having them nominate peers who fit those descriptions (see Table 1 for items). Adolescents answered five questions about how often they used relational aggression (e.g., “How often do you keep a peer out of a group of peers because you are mad at the peer?”), three questions about overt aggression (e.g., “How often do you start fights with others?”), and four questions about prosocial behaviors (e.g., “How often do you help, cooperate, or share with others?”). They responded to these questions on a scale of 1 (*Never*) to 5 (*All the time*). Cronbach’s alphas were .79 for relational aggression, .62 for overt aggression, and .69 for prosocial behaviors.

**Results**

Before examining the hypothesized associations in a structural regression model, the measurement model was first examined in a confirmatory factor analysis using *Mplus* 6.12 (see Table 1). The model fit was adequate (*χ*2 = 995.07, *df* = 692, *p* < .001, *CFI* = .94, *TLI* = .93, *RMSEA* =.03, *SRMR* = .06). All standardized factor loadings were significant (*ps* < .001) with adequate magnitudes, indicating that the items reliably assessed the investigated constructs. These items served as indicators for the latent variables in the structural regression model.

Descriptive statistics were first conducted using composite scores of the constructs (see Table 2). The correlations indicated that popularity goal was correlated positively with self-reported relational aggression and prosocial behaviors. Social preference goal was correlated positively with peer-nominated and self-reported prosocial behaviors, but correlated negatively with self-reported overt aggression. Additionally, social status insecurity was correlated positively with the popularity goal and self-reported relational aggression, but correlated negatively with peer-nominated prosocial behaviors. Furthermore, the two status goals were correlated positively. Adolescents’ social preference was not related to the social preference goal, whereas their popularity was correlated positively with their popularity goal.

The current hypotheses were tested with a structural regression model. We specified paths from social status insecurity to both social status goals and all social behaviors as well as from the social status goals to all social behaviors. The indirect effects from social status goals to social behaviors were tested using Sobel tests. To account for their potential effects, attained peer statuses (popularity and social preference) and gender were controlled in the model by allowing them to predict both goals and all behavioral outcomes. Some error variances of the items were allowed to covary to account for the covariation that could be theoretically justified, such as the reporter effects (e.g., self-reports, peer nominations). To assess the model fit, the comparative fit index (CFI), root mean squared error of approximation (RMSEA), and the Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) were examined. An RMSEA value below .08, CFI and TLI values of .90 or above, and a SRMR value below .10 reflect a good model fit (Kline, 2010). The results showed that the structural model fit the data adequately (*χ*2 = 1148.08, *df* = 781, *p* < .001, *CFI* = .93, *TLI* = .92, *RMSEA* = .03, *SRMR* = .06). As hypothesized (see Figure 1), while controlling for attained status and gender, the social preference goal was associated positively with both self-reported and peer-nominated prosocial behaviors (*β* = .42, *p* < .05 for self-report; *β* = .55, *p* < .01 for peer-nomination), but related negatively to self-reported relational (*β* = -.41, *p* < .05) and overt (*β* = -.54, *p* < .01) aggression. On the other hand, the popularity goal was related positively to self-reported relational aggression (*β* = .45, *p* < .05). Contrary to our expectations, the popularity goal was associated negatively with peer-nominated prosocial behaviors (*β* = -.47, *p* < .01). Social status insecurity was related positively to both the popularity goal (*β* = .36, *p* < .001) and the social preference goal (*β* = .15, *p* < .05). Although the covariates were not the focus of this study, there were some significant paths that are worth noticing. Specifically, adolescents’ popularity status was related positively to their popularity goal (*β* = .19, *p* < .001) and related negatively to social status insecurity (*β* = -.14, *p* < .05). In comparison to boys, adolescent girls had higher social preference goal (*β* = -.19, *p* < .01).

Regarding the associations between social status insecurity and adolescent behaviors, no direct associations were found. Instead, results from Sobel tests showed that social status insecurity was related positively and indirectly to self-reported relational aggression, which was mediated by the popularity goal (*β* = .16, *p* < .05). This suggests that increases in adolescents’ insecure feeling about their peer status were related to higher endorsement of the popularity goal, which was then related to more use of relational aggression as indicated by the self reports. In addition, social status insecurity was related negatively and indirectly to peer-nominated prosocial behaviors through the mediation of popularity goal (*β* = -.17, *p* < .05). That is to say, adolescents’ increased feeling of status insecurity was related to higher endorsement of the popularity goal, which was then related to decreased use of prosocial behaviors.

To explore the variations of goal endorsement among adolescents, we compared five groups of adolescents with different combinations of high/average/low endorsement of each social status goal. Following a previous method (e.g., Parkhurst & Hopmeyer, 1998) of grouping adolescents based on attained popularity and social preference, the classification of high, average, and low levels of social status goals were determined by calculating scores for each goal using mean +/-.50 standard deviations. For meaningful comparisons and easy interpretation, we included the following five goal groups: 1) *high popularity goal* (*N*=33; popularity goal > 3.76, but social preference goal < 4.42), 2) *high social preference goal* (*N*=42; social preference goal *>* 4.42 for, but popularity goal < 3.76), 3) *high popularity and social preference goals* (*N*=51; popularity goal > 3.76 and social preference goal > 4.42), 4) *average popularity and social preference goals* (*N*=62; scores between 2.94 and 3.76 for the popularity goal and scores between 3.68 and 4.42 for the social preference goal), and 5) *low popularity and social preference goals* (*N*=45; popularity goal <2.94 and social preference goal < 3.68). A multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was conducted with popularity and social preference goals as the dependent variables and gender and attained status (i.e., popularity, social preference) as covariates (see Table 3 for the means). There was a significant multivariate main effect for goal groups, Wilks’ Λ = .08, *F*(8,420)= 137.68, *p* < .001. Follow-up analyses indicated that the group with only high popularity goals and the group with both high goals endorsed greater popularity goals in comparison to the other groups. Furthermore, the group with only high social preference goals and the group with both high goals reported higher social preference goals in comparison to the other groups. These differences in social status goals were consistent with adolescents’ goal group memberships.

To examine how the five goal groups differed in behaviors, another MANCOVA was conducted with all six social behaviors as the dependent variables, while including gender and attained status (i.e., popularity, social preference) as covariates. There was a significant multivariate main effect of goal groups, Wilks’ Λ = .69, *F*(24,720)= 3.37, *p* < .001. Follow-up univariate analysis (see Table 3) showed that adolescents with only high social preference goals self-reported the lowest levels of relational aggression in comparison to other groups. In contrast, the group with only high popularity goals and the group with both high goals showed higher self-reported relational aggression. With regard to prosocial behaviors, the high social preference goal group demonstrated the highest level of peer-nominated prosocial behaviors. The mean pattern was similar for self-reported prosocial behavior, with the low goals group reporting the lowest levels of prosocial behavior. Additionally, adolescents with only high popularity goals were nominated by peers as having higher overt aggression than other groups. An additional analysis of covariance was conducted to explore how these goal groups varied on social status insecurity. Again, gender and attained status were included as covariate. As shown in Table 3, adolescents with only high popularity goals reported the highest level of social status insecurity among all groups.

**Discussion**

Being accepted by peers and having a popular status are both important social processes in adolescents’ lives and are actively sought after by them (Bukowski, 2011; Rubin et al., 2006). Although we have gained substantial knowledge about the behavioral characteristics linked to social preference and popularity (e.g., Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004), limited research has examined the social cognitive process for peer status pursuit, in particular the social status goals that may have implications for behaviors and status change. A few earlier studies have explored adolescents’ social goals pertinent to popularity (Jarvinen & Nicholls, 1996; Ryan, Hicks, & Midgley, 1997). However, little attention has been given to social status goals separately addressing popularity and social preference (i.e., popularity goals, social preference goals), which become increasingly differentiated during adolescence (Cillessen & Marks, 2011). Recent research (Wright et al., 2012) has shed some light on the examination of these two social status goals. Nevertheless, several empirical and theoretical issues remain unaddressed in the literature, including a more refined measurement for these two status goals, an exploration of social processes that have implications for the goal formation, the behavioral correlates of these goals while taking into consideration adolescents’ attained status, and the potential heterogeneity of status goal endorsement. This study addressed these important topics and revealed that adolescents’ social preference goal and popularity goal were linked uniquely to their behaviors. Furthermore, social status insecurity was linked to adolescents’ status goals, supporting the theoretical conceptualization that this process may contribute to the formation of social status goals. Additionally, the goal group comparisons suggest that there were various goal endorsements for these two types of peer status as well as behavioral differences among groups. The current study enhances our understanding about adolescents’ social cognitive processing and pursuit of peer status.

**Social status goals**

Findings of this study reveal that adolescents may desire both types of high peer statuses, as evidenced by the positive correlation between the two goals. This supports previous research arguments that adolescents may endorse different social goals (Underwood & Bjornstad, 2001). Acknowledging variations in goal endorsement, the moderate correlation also suggests that some adolescents may have goals for only one type of peer status. Supporting this view, the results from the goal group comparisons showed that there were two small groups of adolescents who only endorsed one social status goal and another group of adolescents who endorsed both goals. Additionally, there was also a small group of adolescents who showed low endorsement of both goals. This heterogeneity of goal endorsement is consistent with previous findings suggesting a growing divergence of popularity versus social preference during adolescence (e.g., Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004). Adolescents may form different values and motivation for being accepted versus attaining a popular status. Furthermore, adolescents with any peer status may desire a higher status because pursuing a higher status is part of normal peer interactions during adolescence (Levy et al., 2004; Rubin et al., 2006). Previous research has shown that youths’ general status goal is not related to their social preference or popularity (Sijtsema et al., 2009). Supporting our expectations, we found that adolescents’ social preference was not related to their social preference goal. However, there was a significant, though low magnitude, positive association between popularity and the popularity goal, suggesting that adolescents with higher popularity were more likely to endorse a popularity goal. Furthermore, this study showed that adolescent boys and girls did not differ in their endorsement of the popularity goal, which is consistent with previous findings on popularity goals (e.g., Jarvinen & Nichols, 1996). However, girls had a higher social preference goal than boys. Girls generally care more about relationships, as evidenced by a higher endorsement of the relationship maintenance goal (Rose & Asher, 1999). Desiring to be liked by peers is consistent with this gender difference and may facilitate peer interactions with an emphasis on relationship maintenance.

**Social status goals and behaviors**

Our expectations about the associations between social status goals and behaviors were partly supported by the findings. After controlling for the popularity goal, the social preference goal was linked negatively to self-reported overt and relational aggression, but related positively to prosocial behaviors as reported by both self and peers. The goal group comparison results also provided a consistent pattern. Adolescents highly endorsing only the social preference goal had higher levels of prosocial behaviors as reported by themselves and peers, but lower levels of self-reported relational aggression and peer-nominated overt aggression. These findings are consistent with Wright et al.’s (2012) findings among Chinese adolescents. Numerous studies have shown that socially preferred children and adolescents are prosocial and not aggressive (Rubin et al., 2006). Because of these established behavioral norms, adolescents who aim to have higher social preference may believe in the necessity to be prosocial, but not in the legitimacy of being aggressive.

As for the popularity goal, it was related positively to self-reported relational aggression. Consistent with this finding, the goal group comparison results showed that adolescents highly endorsing only the popularity goal showed higher endorsement of self-reported relational aggression. These findings are in line with previous research showing that relational aggression is related to popularity and promotes popularity during adolescence (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004; Prinstein & Cillessen; 2003; Rose et al., 2004). Adolescents who desire a high popularity status may see the legitimacy of using relational aggression and thus use it more often. Although the popularity goal was not related to peer-nominated overt aggression in the correlational results, the high popularity goal group had higher overt aggression than other groups. However, the mean was still fairly low. Although overt aggression generally plays a non-significant or even negative role in promoting popularity when children enter adolescence (e.g.,Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004), some research still finds positive associations (Prinstein & Cillessen, 2003). It is possible that early adolescents with only high popularity goals are in the midst of behavioral transition and still use overt aggression to achieve a popularity status.

Contrary to our expectation regarding a positive association between popularity goals and prosocial behavior, we observed a negative association between the popularity goal and peer-nominated prosocial behaviors after controlling for the social preference goal and peer statuses. A few complex dynamics may contribute to this association. Several studies have shown that popular children are highly heterogeneous, including both popular-prosocial and popular-antisocial members (de Bruyn & Cillessen, 2006; Rodkin, Farmer, Pearl, & Van Acker, 2000). It is possible that popular-antisocial members who are low in prosocial behaviors are more likely to have a higher popularity goal. Furthermore, existing research shows that children who are concerned about the implications of their behaviors on their social status are more likely to cooperate only with peers of their own social groups (e.g., peers with similar popularity level; Levy et al., 2004). This suggests that adolescents who would like to maintain or enhance their popularity may be prosocial selectively to a small portion of their peers. Nevertheless, the goal comparison results lend some partial support for our original hypothesis. Although not as prosocial as adolescents who highly endorsed only the social preference goal, adolescents in the two high popularity goal groups (with or without high social preference goal) generally demonstrated comparable prosocial behaviors as the average goals group and higher prosocial behaviors than the low goals group. These findings are consistent with the bistratgic view about popular adolescents (Hawley, 2003) and our theoretical conceptualization that prosocial behaviors may be an effective strategy to achieve the desired popularity status among adolescents endorsing the popularity goal.

The correlational pattern between social status goals and behaviors varied by the reporters of behaviors (i.e., self versus peers). Fewer associations were found for peer-nominated behaviors than self-reported behaviors. In particular, peer-nominated relational aggression and overt aggression showed little associations with goals even though they were related closely to adolescents’ attained peer status (i.e., popularity, social preference). A possible explanation may be that social status goals are mental processes and are not easy to observe by peers, creating some inconsistencies between these two sets of variables. In addition, goals are set to organize and change behaviors (Aarts, 2012; Fishbach & Ferguson, 2007), which may not be so in concordance with peers’ general impression of one’s behaviors as reflected in peer nominations. In contrast, adolescents’ self-reports may closely capture their current goals for peer status and their current behaviors, resulting in stronger associations.

**Social status insecurity, status goals, and behaviors**

This research proposed a correlate of social status goals, social status insecurity, which captures adolescents’ insecure and concerned feeling about their current social standing either being threatened or not being high enough. Supporting our hypothesis, this study revealed that adolescents’ social status insecurity was linked positively to both social status goals. These findings support previous research showing that adolescents’ perceptions of themselves contribute to their social goal endorsement (Elliot & Murayama, 2008; Erdley & Asher, 1996; Ojanen et al., 2007; Salmivalli et al., 2005, 2009). Furthermore, although we did not have any prior hypotheses about the relative strengths of association between social status insecurity with either goal, the findings show a relatively stronger association (based on the standardized path coefficients) with the popularity goal. This is consistent with the goal group comparison results that adolescents who highly endorsed only the popularity goal demonstrated the highest amount of social status insecurity among all groups, which suggests that adolescents with higher insecure feelings about their social standing are more likely to have a higher popularity goal. Additionally, these findings suggest that popularity status may have great implications for adolescents’ sense of well-being centering around peer status and may motivate them to set the popularity goal.

We expect that adolescents with either low or high attained peer statuses may have insecure feelings about their social standing due to their undesirable status or perceptions of their current status being threatened or competed for, resulting in weak associations between social status insecurity and attained statuses. Supporting our hypothesis, we found no significant association between social status insecurity and social preference. However, there was a significant, though low magnitude, negative association between social status insecurity and popularity, indicating that the lower adolescents’ popularity status was, the more likely they were to have higher insecure feelings. This finding implies that lower popularity has a particularly stronger impact on adolescents’ emotional well-being (e.g., more worries) regarding their social standing.

Consistent with Li et al.’s (2010) findings, social status insecurity was correlated positively with self-reported relational aggression and related negatively to peer-nominated prosocial behaviors. However, after controlling for other variables, we found that these associations were manifested in indirect pathways through the mediation of the popularity goal. When adolescents felt insecure about their social status, they were more likely to endorse the popularity goal, which was then linked to higher self-reported relational aggression and less peer-nominated prosocial behaviors. These findings suggest that adolescents’ sense of insecurity about their social status not only has implications for their social cognitive processing about peer status (e.g., setting social status goals), but also has indirect implications for their behaviors.

**Limitations and future directions**

Findings of this study provide valuable information regarding adolescents’ social cognitive processing of peer status. However, these findings should be understood in the context of a few limitations. First, we interpreted the direction of the associations based on theoretical considerations; however, the concurrent study design does not warrant any causal inference. For example, it can be interpreted equally well that adolescents with certain behavioral characteristics are more likely to endorse certain status goals. Longitudinal studies are greatly needed to clarify whether social status goals are indeed prompted by the insecure feelings about status and whether those goals direct behavioral choices and changes. Additionally, because popularity becomes more and more salient and important in peer relationships from middle childhood to adolescence, longitudinal research may examine how children and adolescents’ social status goals change with time and examine the goals’ relative implications for behavioral changes. Second, this study proposed social status insecurity as a general feeling about one’s social standing among peers and demonstrated adequate reliability of this construct. However, whether adolescents generate different types or levels of concerns about popularity versus social preference is unclear and requires further investigation. Third, the current research examined a general pattern of associations and did not take the peer group contexts into consideration. As pointed out by previous research, children’s understanding of peer groups also plays a role in their goal formation and behavioral choices (Salmivalli et al., 2005, 2009). Future research may investigate how adolescents generate insecure feelings about status as a result of peer interactions in their groups and how they use different behaviors to achieve different social status goals in different peer group contexts. Lastly, we did not test gender moderations in the present study because previous research did not suggest gender moderations on the relationships between social status goals and social behaviors (Wright et al., 2012). As the social status insecurity and social status goals were examined among American adolescents for the first time, we also wanted to focus our primary research goals on exploring the associations among the main constructs. However, future research may explore any potential gender moderations on the associations proposed in this study.

Extending previous research (Wright et al., 2012), this study further developed the social status goal constructs to separately address adolescents’ goals set for desired popularity and social preference (i.e., popularity goal, social preference goal). This proposal is in accordance with recent research on peer status demonstrating a divergence of these two types of peer status during adolescence (Cillessen & Mark, 2011). This research revealed unique behavioral associations for each goal and the heterogeneity of endorsement on these two goals. Furthermore, this study represents one of the early efforts to explore other social cognitive processes that are related to social status goals. We proposed the social status insecurity construct reflecting adolescents’ general insecure feelings about their social standing and found that it positively related to both social status goals and indirectly related to adolescents’ behaviors. Findings of this study contribute to our understanding of the social cognitive processes related to peer status and their behavioral implications among adolescents.

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Table 1

*CFA Results for Adolescent Behaviors, Social Status Goals, and Social Status Insecurity*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Item | Standardized Factor Loadings |
| *Peer-nominated Relational Aggression* |  |
| 1. Peers who when mad, get even by keeping the person from being in their group of friends | .77 |
| 2. Peers who tell friends they will stop liking them unless friends do what they say | .79 |
| 3. Peers who when mad at a certain person, ignores them or stops talking to them | .76 |
| 4. Peers who try to keep certain people from being in their group during an activity | .80 |
| *Peer-nominated Overt Aggression* |  |
| 1. Peers who hit, push others | .68 |
| 2. Peers who yell, call others mean names | .69 |
| 3. Peers who start fights | .58 |
| *Peer-nominated Prosocial Behaviors* |  |
| 1. Peers who are good leaders | .66 |
| 2. Peers who do nice things for others | .90 |
| 3. Peers who help others | .83 |
| 4. Peers who cheer up others | .69 |
| *Popularity Goal* |  |
| 1. I want to be popular among my peers. | .79 |
| 2. I want to be included in popular peer groups. | .78 |
| 3. I want to have influence over my peers. | .60 |
| 4. I want to be well-known among my peers. | .78 |
| 5. I want to be dominant among my peers. | .37 |
| 6. I want to be socially central among my peers. | .62 |
| *Social Preference Goal* |  |
| 1. I want to be well liked by my peers. | .71 |
| 2. I want to be accepted by my peers. | .76 |
| 3. I want to be perceived as a good person. | .46 |
| 4. I want to be accepting to my peers. | .66 |
| 5. I don’t want to be disliked. | .40 |

Table 1 Continued

*CFA Results for Adolescent Behaviors, Social Status Goals, and Social Status Insecurity*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Item | Standardized Factor Loadings |
| *Social Status Insecurity* |  |
| 1. I feel that my social status in the class is threatened. | .41 |
| 2. I worry about my popularity among my peers. | .63 |
| 3. I worry that my peers don’t like me. | .71 |
| 4. I feel I am unpopular among my peers. | .84 |
| 5. I feel that my status among my peers is not high. | .77 |
| 6. I feel my peers do not like me. | .72 |
| *Self-reported Relational Aggression* |  |
| 1. How often do you keep a peer out of a group of kids because you are mad at the peer? | .73 |
| 2. How often do you ignore or stop talking to somebody when you are mad at the peer? | .68 |
| 3. How often do you say something bad about people behind their backs? | .55 |
| 4. How often do you tell a peer that they cannot be in the group? | .66 |
| 5. How often do you tell your peers not to include a certain peer? | .59 |
| *Self-reported Overt Aggression* |  |
| 1. How often do you start fights with others? | .53 |
| 2. How often do you say mean things to other peers? | .70 |
| 3. How often do you tell your peers that you will beat them up unless they do what you say? | .56 |
| *Self-reported Prosocial Behaviors* |  |
| 1. How often do you help, cooperate or share with others? | .38 |
| 2. How often do you say something nice to your peers? | .61 |
| 3. How often do you cheer another peer up when they are unhappy? | .50 |
| 4. How often do you tell another peer you care about them? | .67 |

*Note*. All loadings were significant at *p* < .001.

Table 2

*Descriptive Statistics for Social Status Goals, Social Status Insecurity, Social Preference, Popularity, and Adolescent Behaviors*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 |
| 1. Popularity Goal | --- |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 2. Social Preference Goal | .57\*\*\* | --- |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 3. Social Status Insecurity | .31\*\*\* | .08 | --- |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 4. Popularity | .17\*\* | .06 | -.10 | --- |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 5. Social Preference | -.04 | .09 | -.11 | .32\*\*\* | --- |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 6. SRRA | .21\*\*\* | -.09 | .22\*\*\* | .07 | -.20\*\*\* | --- |  |  |  |  |  |
| 7. SROA | .04 | -.21\*\*\* | .09 | .08 | -.23\*\*\* | .61\*\*\* | --- |  |  |  |  |
| 8. SRPB | .21\*\*\* | .35\*\*\* | .03 | .12\* | .21\*\*\* | -.14\*\*\* | -.22\*\*\* | --- |  |  |  |
| 9. PNRA | .11 | .09 | .09 | .21\*\*\* | -.10\* | .20\*\*\* | .19\*\*\* | .07 | --- |  |  |
| 10. PNOA | .06 | -.05 | -.02 | -.12\* | -.27\*\*\* | .20\*\*\* | .36\*\*\* | -.02 | .42\*\*\* | --- |  |
| 11. PNPB | .02 | .21\*\*\* | -.14\* | .20\*\*\* | .50\*\*\* | -.15\*\* | -.18\*\*\* | .30\*\*\* | .05 | -.04 | --- |
| *Mean* | 3.35 | 4.05 | 2.35 | .08 | .56 | 1.95 | 1.75 | 3.77 | .13 | -.10 | .40 |
| *SD* | .83 | .75 | .87 | 1.52 | 1.68 | .71 | .62 | .68 | 1.00 | .64 | 1.15 |

*Note.* SRRA = self-reported relational aggression; SROA = self-reported over aggression; SRPB = self-reported prosocial behaviors; PNRA = peer-nominated relational aggression; PNOA = peer-nominated overt aggression; PNPB = peer-nominated prosocial behaviors.

\* *p* < .05. \*\* *p* < .01. \*\*\* *p* < .001.

Table 3

*Means and Standard Deviations for Goal Groups*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | High Popularity Goal (*N*=33) | High Social Preference Goal (*N*=42) | High Popularity & Social Preference Goals (*N*=51) | Average Popularity & Social Preference Goals (*N*=62) | Low Popularity & Social Preference Goals (*N*=45) | *F* (4, 211) |
| Popularity Goal | 4.13a (.34) | 3.19a (.56) | 4.37a(.34) | 3.40a (.22) | 2.31a (.57) | 154.27\*\*\* |
| Social Preference Goal | 4.08ac (.38) | 4.79 ad (.17) | 4.87 bce (.17) | 4.08 bd (.20) | 2.97 ade (.51) | 245.09\*\*\* |
| SSI | 2.90abcd (.86) | 2.11a (.73) | 2.40b (1.09) | 2.39c (.80) | 2.15d (.80) | 4.09\*\* |
| SRRA | 2.22a (1.00) | 1.55ab (.44) | 2.00b (.71) | 1.96b (.63) | 1.91b (.64) | 2.83\* |
| SRPB | 3.78a (.67) | 4.01b (.52) | 3.97c (.70) | 3.85d (.63) | 3.28abcd (.56) | 7.86\*\*\* |
| SROA | 1.79 (.62) | 1.46 (.43) | 1.72 (.70) | 1.74 (.51) | 1.85 (.69) | 1.34 |
| PNRA | .52 (1.37) | .01 (.70) | .19 (.93) | .18 (.74) | -.00 (.74) | 1.08 |
| PNPB | .29 (.86) | 1.10abc (1.69) | .37a (.91) | .27b (1.20) | -.00c (.52) | 3.29\* |
| PNOA | .34abcd (.95) | -.23a (.35) | -.20b (.31) | -.10c (.52) | -.19d (.40) | 5.13\*\*\* |

*Note*. Covariates included gender, popularity, and social preference. Means within a row sharing the same subscript letter were found to be significantly different. The degrees of freedom for SSI was *F*(4,206), rather than *F*(4,211) for the others. SSI = social status insecurity; SRRA = self-reported relational aggression; SRPB = self-reported prosocial behavior; SROA = self-reported overt aggression; PNRA = peer-nominated relational aggression; PNPB = peer-nominated prosocial behavior; PNOA = peer-nominated overt aggression.

Figure Captions

*Figure* 1. Structural model for the associations between social status goals and other variables. Standardizedpath coefficients are presented. To facilitate reading, non-significant paths, the disturbance correlations, and paths for gender covariate are omitted. For the significant paths linked to gender, adolescent girls had higher social preference goal (*β* = -.19, *p* < .01), self-reported prosocial behaviors (*β* = -.38, *p* < .001), and peer-nominated relational aggression (*β* = -.17, *p* < .01) than boys.

*\* p* < .05. \*\* *p* < .01. \*\*\* *p* < .001.

Figure1