

Social Goals, Social Status, and Problem Behavior among Low-Achieving and High-Achieving Adolescents from Rural Schools

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The current research examines how social goals and perceptions of what is needed for social status at school relate to school misbehavior and substance use among rural adolescents (N = 683). Results indicate that social goals and perceptions of social status have differential links to problem behaviors depending upon adolescents' achievement. Status social goals where adolescents' indicate that being popular is important are associated with a greater likelihood of alcohol use and school misbehavior only among high achievers in the sample. In contrast, intimacy social goals to see friends are associated with a lower probability of marijuana use regardless of achievement. Both low- and high-achieving adolescents who perceive that grades are important for high status in school are less likely to use cigarettes and cut classes. High achievers, however, are more likely to engage in school misbehavior when they perceive that college plans are needed for social status; and low achievers are more likely to report cigarette use and that they have been suspended when they perceive the social status of sports to be high. Compared to low achievers, high achievers are less likely to have engaged in problem behaviors, and they report higher levels of social goals, social status of grades and sports, as well as, sports importance and participation. Keywords: rural adolescents, academic achievement, social goals, substance use.

Throughout childhood and adolescence, the school setting provides opportunities for youth to find social support and forge relationships with peers, and also, for youth to gain understanding about how social networks function. In small, rural communities, schools are likely to be the primary places for socialization outside the home. Through school-based peer socialization, adolescents observe their peers and gain an understanding of status and hierarchies within the school, developing a sense of what behaviors are and are not valued by their peers (Crosnoe, 2011). Thus, they begin to establish what it is that they want to accomplish and to avoid when they are with their peers in school, that is, they establish their social goals (Ryan & Shim, 2008; Salmivalli & Peets, 2009). Research has documented that adolescents set such social goals as learning how to be a good friend, being intimate with friends, avoiding things that would cause embarrassment or teasing around peers, wanting to be accepted by the popular kids at school, or gaining dominance over other youth at school (Roussel, Elliot, & Feltman, 2010; Ryan & Shim, 2008). In small, rural communities, social goals in school are particularly important, as school bonding and a supportive classroom environment in these tight-knit environments serve as

important protective factors in promoting engagement and positive youth development, even more so than in urban or suburban contexts (Hardré, Sullivan, & Crowson, 2009; Shears, Edwards, & Stanley, 2006).

In the small, social network of a rural school, maintaining positive relationships with others over time and having social goals may be particularly important for adolescents. Teachers and students know a lot about each other in small schools. These supportive adults can help to create a supportive atmosphere that fosters prosocial goals, achievement motivation and engagement in positive behaviors (Hardré & Reeve, 2003; Hardré et al., 2009; Lee, Smerdon, Alfeld-Liro & Brown, 2000; Singh & Dika, 2003). However, negative experiences with teachers and peers can also lead to unfavorable reputations that adolescents perceive are difficult to shift and to strong interpersonal influences that lead to decisions and behaviors that compromise positive youth development (Lee et al., 2000). In addition, research suggests that in small, rural schools where students are in the same school from K through 8th or K through 12th grade, bullying and jockeying for social status may be more prevalent among students than in rural settings where students transition among different schools (e.g., middle school and high school) during adolescence (Farmer, Hamm, Leung, Lambert, & Gravelle, 2011). This suggests that not all rural experiences are the same, and that some students in small, rural schools may be particularly vulnerable to problems associated with meeting their social

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goals. Given that adolescents from rural schools are also more likely than their counterparts from non-rural schools to use alcohol and drugs, engage in delinquent behaviors, have low levels of achievement, drop out of school, and report depressive symptoms (Atav & Spencer, 2002; Roscigno, Tomaskovic-Devey, & Crowley, 2006; Vazxonyi, Trejos-Castillo, & Young, 2008), it is important to understand the social context of this often tight-knit school setting.

The small, rural school serves as a gathering place and social center for youth activities in the community (Elder & Conger, 2000; Parker, 2001). Students in these schools are more involved in activities, have more leadership roles, and more social prominence individually than students in larger, rural, urban, and suburban schools (Elder & Conger, 2000; Parker, 2001). However, even in a small, rural school setting, adolescents are highly aware of various peer groups (e.g., jocks, nerds, skaters, cowboys, Goths), strive to fit in with peers, and are aware of the substance use patterns of these different groups in their schools (Kelly, Comello, & Edwards, 2004). The current research examines how adolescents' social goals and perceptions of social status within small, rural schools are associated with their school misbehavior and substance use.

Understanding adolescents' social goals in school may help us to understand their problem behaviors across contexts. Well-adjusted adolescents, for example, are likely to have intimacy social goals, namely interpersonal goals to maintain good relationships, whereas, delinquent and at-risk youth have fewer of these goals (Carroll, Durkin, Hattie, & Houghton, 1997). However, Carroll and colleagues (1997) also found that not at risk youth, youth at risk, and delinquent youth were equally likely to endorse social goals that emphasized reputation and popularity, that is, status social goals. Social worlds and academic worlds are connected—when adolescents have difficulty socially, they are likely to have difficulty academically, and vice versa (Crosnoe, 2011; Kupersmidt, Buchele, Voegler, & Sedikides, 1996). This is true regardless of whether students come from small, rural schools or large, urban schools. However, in small school environments where students receive more personalized attention, adolescents are likely to be cognizant of the fact that teachers and peers are aware of both their academic behaviors and their problem behaviors outside of school (Elder & Conger, 2000; Kelly et al., 2004; Lee et al., 2000). Thus, it may be that for rural adolescents' links between school attitudes and behaviors and problem behaviors are more relevant than for other youth.

Intimacy and Status Social Goals and Problem Behavior

To satisfy different social goals and to be with friends are important reasons why adolescents go to school (Ryan, 2000). Crosnoe (2011) notes that adolescents primarily discuss their resilience in school in terms of the protective

effects of having close friends. Ford (1996) describes two general types of social goals that adolescents may have in school: a) goals that relate to self-assertiveness and preservation of status, and b) integrative goals that relate to intimacy and maintaining friendships. Adolescents' status social goals serve to maintain or promote the self; these goals include adolescents' desires to enhance their reputation or popularity, compare favorably with others and also to obtain approval, validation, and support from others (Carroll et al., 1997; Ford, 1996; Kiefer & Ryan, 2008). Intimacy social goals (sometimes also called friendship-approach goals) relate to maintaining relationships and serve to promote the well-being of others (Ford, 1996; Kiefer & Ryan, 2008; Roussel et al., 2011). In order to attain these social goals, adolescents need to think they are worthy of pursuit, and they need skills and an environment that supports their progress. Rural youth are reliant upon school for meeting their social goals as there are few social interaction opportunities outside school (Hendry, Kloep, & Wood, 2002).

Adolescents' social goals have meaning beyond forming close friendships and selecting peer groups—these goals also relate to academic experiences and problem behavior. Research indicates that rural adolescents, who have an easy time making friends, are more likely than other rural adolescents who have trouble fitting in to engage in prosocial behaviors over time such as helping others (Carlo, Crockett, Randall, & Roesch, 2007). Intimacy social goals have been associated with approach goals toward other activities in school, positive effect, and achievement (Kiefer & Ryan, 2008; Wentzel, 1999). However, research suggests that adolescents who have close friendships are not necessarily less likely to use substances or be delinquent; delinquent and non-delinquent youth both have close friends (Brown, Dolcini, & Leventhal, 1997). In addition, although high-achievers have close friendships, they more often pursue academic mastery goals (e.g., to be a successful student) than goals to make friends in the classroom, whereas, the opposite is true for low-achievers who are more likely to emphasize intimacy social goals in the school setting (Wentzel, 1989). Thus, the effects of intimacy social goals on academic and problem behaviors may vary given adolescents' level of achievement.

In relation to status social goals and problem behavior, being popular, and placing importance on popularity and status have been associated with problem behaviors such as disrupting and skipping classes, delinquency, alcohol and drug use, and perceived pressure to engage in problem behaviors (Balsa, Homer, French, & Norton, 2011; Kiefer & Ryan, 2008; Santor, Messervey, & Kusumakar, 2000). It is notable that among high school graduates about to attend college, those who are stressed about making friends plan to consume more alcohol in college than those who see

making friends as less stressful (Rhoades & Maggs, 2006). This suggests that those who worry about being accepted by others may use alcohol as a means to acceptance. Sociometric research indicates that adolescents who drink are more popular than those who abstain from drinking and that when adolescents' level of drinking is below their classmates average level of drinking, conforming to the drinking levels of their peers is associated with an increase in popularity (Balsa et al., 2011). The current research examines how rural adolescents' endorsement of intimacy social goals and status social goals are linked with their engagement in problem behavior. Does having a goal to be popular and gain status, or, to make close friends, protect adolescents against problem behavior, or make them more vulnerable? Extant research suggests that the type of social goal matters and adolescents' level of achievement also may make a difference.

Problem Behavior and the Perceived Social Status of Academics and Sports

Adolescence is a time when young people construct ideas about what behaviors in school are valued by their peers and they try to figure out how to fit in with others (Brown & Klute, 2003). When adolescents perceive that the peer social context of their school emphasizes grades and competition, they are more likely to engage in misbehavior such as disrupting the teachers, cheating, or truancy (Anderman, Griesinger, & Westerfield, 1998; Kaplan, Gheen, & Midgley, 2002; Roeser & Eccles, 1998). Similarly, when adolescents, particularly low-achievers, perceive that the classroom environment is geared more towards the high-achievers in class, adolescents are more likely to use drugs and alcohol (Ludden & Eccles, 2007). With regard to the status of academics and college plans among rural youth, in general, they have fewer educational plans (Sarigiani, Wilson, Peterson, & Vicary, 1990; Strayhorn, 2009) and more ambivalence about school than urban and suburban youth (D'Amico, Matthes, Sankar, Merchant, & Zurita, 1996; Lee & Eckstrom, 1987). Notably, although rural youth living in high poverty communities report lower grades and less parental education than rural youth living in low poverty communities, research from a national study indicates that rural youth living in higher levels of poverty report higher levels of educational aspirations and more postsecondary preparation activities than those living in low poverty communities (Irvin, Meece, Byun, Farmer, & Hutchins, 2011). While other national studies have found negative correlations between socioeconomic disadvantage and rural adolescents' expectations for graduating from high school (Henry, Cavanagh, & Oetting, 2011), for youth living in rural poverty, having college plans could be a way to gain status or motivate themselves in school. Examining how rural adolescents view the status of college plans is warranted and it may help us to understand the roles that

college plans serve socially and academically for students.

Research supports the notion that the peer culture within a school helps to shape adolescents' behavior. For example, if adolescents perceive that many of their high status peers drink, take AP classes, or work hard in school, they are more likely to endorse these same behaviors (Crosnoe, 2011). Previous studies indicate that rural adolescents with friends who have poor school adjustment, low academic achievement, a history of suspensions or have dropped out, are more likely than those with friends with more positive school experiences to use drugs (Oetting, Edwards, Kelly, & Beauvais, 1997). The current research examines how adolescents' perceptions of the social status of academics among their peers relate to adolescents engagement in problem behavior. Existing research, as discussed above, suggests that when the peer culture emphasizes academic achievement, substance use and school misbehavior are less prevalent. However, in school environments that marginalize some students based on their academic profiles, problem behaviors may be more prevalent (Crosnoe, 2011, Ludden & Eccles, 2007).

A recent review of the literature suggests that being an athlete is also an important contributor to social status and popularity among male and female adolescents—this importance increases over the course of adolescence as well (Kiefer & Ryan, 2011; Lindstrom & Lease, 2005). Research on rural adolescents indicates that they perceive that their friends think that participating in sports is more “cool” than participating in school activities or getting good grades (Elder & Conger, 2000). Previous research has not considered how adolescents' perceptions of the social status of sports relate to their problem behavior. Investigation of these links is particularly important in the rural Midwest where athletic events are a vital part of community life (Elder & Conger, 2000). In small, rural schools, most adolescents take part in some type of sports activity (Kannapel & DeYoung, 1999; Videon, 2002). Adolescents may feel increased pressures to be active in sports in these small schools because fewer students are available to participate—larger schools may actually have fewer opportunities and more uninvolved students (Elder & Conger, 2000; Kannapel & DeYoung, 1999). In schools where youth perceive that popular students do sports, this may produce a sports-oriented school culture that also contributes to higher levels of alcohol use among students. Research suggests that sporting events in high school are often a time when adolescents participate in “pregaming”—drinking alcohol in order to “get buzzed” before social events (Zamboanga et al., 2011).

Achievement Differences

It is likely that the influence of social factors on problem behavior is different for low-achievers and high-achievers. Graham (2004) posits that low achievement and social misbehavior in school are part of the same moral system

linked by low perceived responsibility. Adolescents who are not achieving in school have low responsibility towards themselves and have low responsibility towards others resulting in higher social misbehavior. An understanding of how the social goals and perceptions of the social environment are differentially linked to problem behavior for low-achievers and high-achievers will help us to understand whether achievement and misbehavior are indeed in the same moral framework as Graham asserts.

As we consider whether achievement and problem behaviors are linked, it is important to keep in mind that both high- and low-achieving adolescents are vulnerable to social marginalization in school (Crosnoe, 2011). Thus, like low-achievers, high-achievers are also vulnerable to the negative effects produced by such marginalization. High-achieving adolescents are more likely than low-achievers to pursue both popularity and intimacy social goals in school (Jarvinen & Nicholls, 1996). Qualitative research by Crosnoe (2011) indicates that some marginalized high-achieving adolescents invest great time and energy into trying to fit in. This may involve efforts to reshape their identity by endorsing a new set of behaviors or attitudes that lessen the emphasis on achievement (Crosnoe, 2011). In addition, research also indicates that popular high-achievers may be more likely to try to increase their social status by engaging in anti-social and bullying behaviors than unpopular high-achievers, a pattern that is not seen among low-achievers (de Bruyn & Cillessen, 2006).

Regarding the varying effects of the high status of academics among peers across high- and low-achieving adolescents, Crosnoe, Riegle-Crumb, Field, Frank, and Muller (2008) examined two competing hypotheses. The cumulative advantage hypothesis posits peer contexts that emphasize academic success (i.e., where overall achievement among peers is higher vs. lower) help high-achievers more, whereas, the protection hypothesis posits that the high achievement context helps the lower-achievers more. They found more support for the cumulative advantage hypothesis for both boys and girls: high-achievers benefited more than low-achievers in terms of taking more math courses from an environment where they had high-achieving peers around them. This study did not examine adolescents' perceptions of whether their high-achieving peers had high status and were popular. It may also be true that high-achieving students, compared to low-achieving students, would benefit more from the perception that academics have high status among their peers, thus, reducing their problem behavior.

Current Research and Hypotheses

The current research examines how adolescents' personal social goals and perceptions of social status are associated with their problem behavior. Problem behavior is examined in terms of whether adolescents in eighth and ninth grade have ever engaged in alcohol, cigarette, and

marijuana use in their lifetime, been in trouble for school misbehavior during the past year, cut classes during the previous month, or been suspended or expelled in their lifetime; dichotomous yes/no responses were used for each of these problem behaviors. Although these different problem behaviors vary in their severity and simply trying alcohol or cigarettes once may not seem like an indicator of problem behavior, research suggests that adolescents who have engaged in these behaviors differ from their counterparts who have never engaged in these behaviors in their school engagement and peer groups (Ludden & Eccles, 2007). In addition, truancy, suspensions, and alcohol, cigarette, and marijuana use have been used together as indicators of problem behavior in previous studies (e.g., Fortunato, Young, Boyd, & Fons, 2010). Moreover, dichotomous yes/no indicators of whether or not adolescents have ever used substances such as alcohol and cigarettes have been used as indicators of problem behavior for rural adolescents in this age range (e.g., Chilenski, 2011). In this study, two sets of logistic regressions will be used to examine how (a) adolescents' endorsement of various social goals and (b) perceptions of the social status of academics and sports, are both associated with their engagement in different problem behaviors.

Social goals and problem behavior. It is expected that adolescents with intimacy goals to see friends at school will be less likely to engage in the less common problem behaviors such as marijuana or suspensions (which suggest social isolation), but few differences are expected in the more prevalent problem behaviors such as alcohol use or school misbehavior. This is consistent with Brown and colleagues' (1997) findings that both substance users and nonusers have close friends. In terms of social status, adolescents' popularity, importance of popularity, and their goals to be social in school are expected to be associated with problem behaviors more generally.

Social status of academics and sports and problem behaviors. It is expected that when adolescents perceive that participating in sports is what counts for popularity, this would be a more risky environment for problem behavior than an environment that emphasizes high grades for popularity. Regarding emphasis on college plans for popularity, rural adolescents may see this as an environment that caters only to college-bound, thus, increasing marginality and problem behavior. Or, it may be that these perceptions operate similarly to an emphasis on high grades where students, overall, benefit from the academic focus and are less likely to engage in problem behavior.

When adolescents perceive that their friends think school success is cool and that their friends do not use drugs and alcohol, their own substance use is lower and increases less during high school than if they think their friends use drugs and think that doing well in school is uncool (Bryant & Zimmerman, 2002). However, it is the broader peer culture in

a school that can have a powerful influence even beyond the influences of adolescents' closest friends (Crosnoe, 2011). Thus, it is expected that both adolescents' intimacy and status social goals, as well as, their perceptions of the social status of academics and sports (i.e., the hypotheses summarized in the two paragraphs above) will be associated with adolescents' reports of problem behavior even after accounting for their perceptions of their friends' level of school misbehavior and substance use. Because adolescents may attribute their own behavior to the behavior of their friends (Ennett et al., 2006), controlling for perceptions of friends behavior may indicate how other social factors uniquely contribute to adolescents' problem behavior. We also included controls for one's own achievement, as well as, one's own college plans and participation in/importance of sports to examine fully the unique effects of adolescents' perceptions of the peer culture.

Achievement differences. In terms of achievement differences, based on work by Crosnoe (2011) and de Bruyn & Cillessen (2006), it is expected that popularity importance and being popular will be more of a risk factor for problem behavior for high-achievers than they are for low-achievers. Low-achievers are expected to be more at risk for problem behaviors when they perceive that achievement and college plans are key indicators of social status at their schools as they are likely to feel more marginalized in such an environment. High-achievers, in contrast, are expected to be at risk for problem behaviors when they perceive that doing well in sports over academics is what counts for being popular.

Method

Sample and Procedures

The current study includes 683 eighth (53%) and ninth (47%) graders from 13 small schools in rural towns in Missouri. In terms of ethnicity, 85.4% of the adolescents were white, 4.5% of the students were African American, 1.7% were Latino, 1.5% were Native American, and 4.2% were other minority. In terms of gender, 61.3% were female. Parental education (highest between two parents was used) reported by adolescents ranged between completed grade school or less (1) and graduate or professional degree after college (6); the average was between some college (4) and completed college (5) and the median level was completed college.

The 13 schools were very similar demographically and match the demographics of the current sample. In terms of selection criteria for schools, the rural towns all had populations less than 15,000 and were at least 20 miles from small cities (i.e., populations less than 100,00 people) and at least 100 miles from major cities (i.e., populations greater than 250,000); in addition, all ninth grade classes were in high schools and eighth graders were either in a K-8 school or a middle school. Very little variance in the

outcomes variables was found across schools; interclass correlations—the percentage of variance in the outcomes that can be accounted for by school effects, ranged between 1.0% (cutting classes) and 4.0% (lifetime alcohol use). School sizes ranged from 348 to 785 for high school enrollments and 212 to 588 for elementary schools.

Students completed self-report surveys (using a paper/pencil format); the author and trained graduate students read the survey to participants in a group setting during school hours. Survey administration lasted approximately one half hour. All adolescents received parental permission to participate. Response rates (determined by participants returning parental consent forms and agreeing to participate) among adolescents sampled ranged from 59% to 100% across schools.

Measures

Means and standard deviations are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Problem behaviors. Participants indicated whether they had ever engaged in alcohol, cigarette, and marijuana use in their lifetimes, been in trouble for school misbehavior during the past year, cut classes during the previous month, or been suspended or expelled in their lifetimes. The six outcome measures were continuous variables that were recorded as dichotomies because they were quite skewed. Substance use measures were the *Monitoring the Future* measures of lifetime cigarette, alcohol, and marijuana use (Bachman, Johnston, & O'Malley, 2005). For cigarette use, students were asked if they had ever in their lifetime smoked cigarettes; never responses were coded as no use and all other responses were coded as yes. For alcohol use, adolescents were asked if they had ever had beer, wine, or liquor to drink in their lifetime; yes/no responses were used. For marijuana use, adolescents indicated how many occasions (if any) they have used marijuana (grass, pot) or hashish (hash, hash oil) in their lifetime; zero times was coded as no use and all other responses were coded as yes.

School misbehavior measures (Bryant, Schulenberg, O'Malley, Bachman, & Johnston, 2003) were also from *Monitoring the Future* (Bachman et al., 2005) and they were all also recorded as dichotomous. As an indicator of cut classes, adolescents were asked about how often during the previous month they have gone to school, but skipped a class when they were not supposed to; "not at all" was coded as no and all other responses were coded as yes. For school misbehavior, adolescents reported how often during the previous year they were sent to the office or had to stay after school because they misbehaved; "never" was coded as no and all other responses were coded as yes. Lastly, adolescents were asked if they had ever been suspended or expelled from school; student responses included "no," "yes (1 time)," and "yes (two or more times)," these latter responses were coded as yes.

Table 1
Means (and Standard Deviations) of Dichotomous Problem Behavior Outcome Variables for Low and High Achievers and the Entire Sample

Problem Behavior	Low-Achievers (B and below) (n = 378)	High-Achievers (B+ or higher) (n = 294)	Total (N = 683)
Ever Used Cigarettes	0.64 (0.48)***	0.31 (0.46)	0.45 (0.50)
Ever Used Alcohol	0.79 (0.41)***	0.62 (0.49)	0.69 (0.46)
Ever Used Marijuana	0.34 (0.47)**	0.11 (0.31)	0.21 (0.41)
Cut Classes during Previous Month	0.12 (0.32)**	0.05 (0.22)	0.08 (0.27)
Misbehaved in School during Previous Year	0.63 (0.48)***	0.29 (0.46)	0.44 (0.50)
Even Been Suspended or Expelled	0.30 (0.46)***	0.09 (0.29)	0.18 (0.39)

*** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$

Table 2
Means (and Standard Deviations) Predictor Variables for Low and High Achievers and the Entire Sample

Predictors	Range	Low-Achievers (B and below) (n = 378)	High-Achievers (B+ or higher) (n = 294)	Total (N = 683)
Parental Education	1-6	4.12 (1.36)	4.58 (1.22)***	4.39 (1.30)
Academic Achievement (Grades)	1-9	4.36 (1.56)	8.06 (0.82)***	6.40 (2.23)
Friends' Substance Use	1-5	2.17 (1.04)***	1.61 (0.72)	1.85 (0.91)
Friends' School Experiences	1-5	3.31 (0.70)	3.77 (0.54)	3.57 (0.65)
Popularity Perception	1-7	4.20 (1.71)	4.63 (1.45)***	4.44 (1.58)
Popularity Importance	1-7	3.45 (1.96)	3.51 (1.84)	3.48 (1.89)
See Friends' Goal for School Attendance	1-7	5.38 (1.78)	5.69 (1.59)*	5.56 (1.68)
Be Social Goal for School Attendance	1-7	4.74 (2.01)	5.06 (1.77)*	4.91 (1.89)
Importance of Good Grades for Social Status	1-5	3.60 (1.03)	3.80 (1.01)*	3.71 (1.03)
Personal School Importance	1-5	3.93 (0.79)	4.30 (0.60)***	4.14 (0.72)
Importance of College Plans for Social Status	1-5	3.62 (1.32)	3.69 (1.21)	3.66 (1.26)
Personal College Plans	1-4	3.04 (0.89)	3.64 (0.56)***	3.38 (0.78)
Importance of Sports for Social Status	1-5	3.38 (1.35)	3.78 (1.19)***	3.61 (1.27)
Personal Sports Importance	1-7	3.89 (2.22)	4.41 (2.14)**	4.18 (2.19)
Personal Sports Participation	1-5	2.27 (1.67)	3.07 (1.74)***	2.73 (1.76)

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

Social goals and perceptions of popularity. Status social goals were indicated by measures of popularity importance and having a “to be social” goal for attending school; participants’ own perception of their popularity was also measured. For popularity, on a 7-point scale, adolescents were asked to compare themselves to other kids their age and indicate a) how popular they thought they were and b) the importance of popularity (Eccles, 1993; Ludden, 2011; Ludden & Eccles, 2007) where 1 = much less important to me than to other kids and 7 = much more important to me than to other kids. For the “to be social goal,” adolescents were asked why they go to school and asked to rate how important a being social reason (i.e., “I go to school because... I like to be social”) was for going to school were to them where 1 = not an important reason and 7 = a very important reason (Eccles, 1993).

For intimacy social goals, adolescents were asked why they go to school and asked to rate how important seeing friends (i.e., “I go to school because... I like to see my friends there”) was as a reason for going to school where 1 = not an important reason and 7 = a very important reason (Eccles, 1993).

Social status perceptions. In three separate items, adolescents indicated how important getting good grades, planning to go to college, and doing sports were for being looked up to or having high status in their current school (Bryant et al., 2003) where 1 = no importance, 2 = little importance, 3 = moderate importance, 4 = great importance, and 5 = very great importance.

Academic achievement. Adolescents indicated which grade describes their average grade last year; where A (93 – 100) = 9, A- (90 – 92) = 8, B+ (87 – 89) = 7, B (83 – 86) = 6, B- (80 – 82) = 5, C+ (77 – 79) = 4, C (73 – 76) = 3, C- (70 – 72) = 2; and D or below (69 or below) = 1.

Friends’ behaviors. For negative behaviors, this is a measure of adolescents’ report of the number of friends they have who have used cigarettes, alcohol, and marijuana at least once a month (3 items; scale ranged from 1 [none] to 5 [all]; Cronbach’s alpha is .84; Bryant & Zimmerman, 2002). For positive school behaviors, this is a composite measure of adolescents’ report of the number of friends they have who have different positive school experiences (e.g., good grades; 6 items; scale ranged from 1 [none] to 5 [all]; Cronbach’s alpha is .72; Bryant & Zimmerman, 2002; Eccles, 1993).

Personal beliefs and behaviors. Adolescents also indicated their personal beliefs about the importance of or their participation in the behaviors related to social status (i.e., grades, college plans, and sports). School importance was indicated by adolescents’ responses to 4 items (e.g., “I have to do well in school if I want to be a success in life”) where 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither disagree or agree, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree (Cronbach’s alpha is .85; Eccles, 1993). College plans

were measured by adolescents’ indications of how likely it is that they will graduate from college (4-year program) (1 = definitely won’t; 4 = definitely will). Adolescents’ also reported how important sports were to them compared to other kids their age where 1 = much less important to me than to other kids and 7 = much more important to me than to other kids (Eccles, 1993). Lastly, adolescents reported their participation in athletic teams at school so far during this school year (starting in the fall) (1 = not at all; 5 = great).

Data Analytic Strategy

First, in order to obtain descriptive information comparing high- to low-achievers; two groups were created based on self-reported grades so that the sample would be roughly split in half. Low-achievers were compared to high-achievers in terms of both the predictor (Table 1) and outcome variables (Table 2). Next, in order to address the hypotheses, separate logistic regressions were used to consider social goal and social status predictors of the six dichotomous outcome variables related to school misbehavior and substance use. Overall, for the logistic regressions (summarized below), z-scores of the predictor variables were included as well as interaction terms, which were computed by multiplying academic achievement z-scores by the z-scores of the social goal and social status variables. Pairwise deletion of missing data was used across all of the analyses.

The first set of hypotheses posited that status social goals (i.e., greater popularity perception, popularity importance, and having a goal to be social at school) would be associated with more problem behavior even after controlling for adolescents’ perceptions of their friends academic and substance use behaviors. Thus, the first series of six separate logistic regressions included controls for parental education, gender, grade level, achievement, perceptions of friends’ substance use, and perceptions of friends positive school experiences, and examined popularity perception, popularity importance, having a seeing friends goal for school attendance, and having a “to be social” goal for school attendance as predictors of whether or not adolescents have ever used cigarettes, alcohol, and marijuana; cut classes; engaged in school misbehavior; and been suspended or expelled. To examine the last set of hypotheses which posited that high levels of the social status goals would be more risky in terms of problem behavior for high achieving adolescents, four interaction terms were included where achievement was multiplied by popularity perception, popularity importance, the seeing friends goal and the being social goal (results are presented in Table 3).

The second set of hypotheses posited that when adolescents perceive that high status is associated with good grades and college plans, problem behavior would be lower overall even after controlling for the experiences

Table 3
Predicted Odds Ratios for Substance Use and School Misbehavior Outcomes from Logistic Regressions Including Achievement, Friends' Experiences, Social Goals, and Achievement Interactions

Variable	Ever Used Cigarettes	Ever Used Marijuana	Cut Classes during Previous Month	Misbehaved in School during Previous Year	Even Been Suspended or Expelled
Parental Education	0.960	0.965	1.235	0.999	1.085
Female	1.462	1.707	1.531	0.299***	0.246***
Ninth Grade	0.728	1.137	0.609	0.625*	0.683
Academic Achievement (Grades)	0.410***	0.603**	0.542***	0.446***	0.442***
Perceptions of Friends' Substance Use	2.833***	3.292***	1.585**	2.091***	1.285
Perceptions of Friends' Positive School Experiences	0.995	0.875	0.788	0.930	0.800
Popularity Perception	1.132	1.615***	1.842**	1.045	1.075
Popularity Importance	1.165	1.063	1.141	1.261	1.169
Seeing Friends Goal for School Attendance	0.798	0.937	1.263	1.045	0.863
Be Social Goal for School Attendance	1.268	1.101	0.707	1.106	1.091
Grades for Popularity Perception Interaction	0.954	1.027	1.212	0.80	0.893
Grades for Popularity Importance Interaction	0.978	1.329*	1.193	1.362**	1.211
Grades for Seeing Friends' Goal Interaction	0.979	1.269	1.112	1.089	1.083
Grades by Being Social Goal Interaction	0.952	0.808	0.778	0.693**	0.877
Nagelkerke R ²	0.403	0.341	0.214	0.383	0.309

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

Table 4
Predicted Odds Ratios for Substance Use and School Misbehavior Outcomes from Logistic Regressions Including Achievement, Friends' Experiences, Personal and Social Status Perceptions, and Achievement Interactions

Variable	Ever Used Cigarettes	Ever Used Alcohol	Ever Used Marijuana	Cut Classes during Previous Month	Misbehaved in School during Previous Year	Ever Been Suspended or Expelled
Parental Education	0.927	0.971	1.234*	1.207	1.005	1.079
Female	1.480	1.751*	0.536*	1.673	0.365***	0.245***
Ninth Grade	0.618*	1.212	0.983	0.528	0.651*	0.646
Academic Achievement (Grades)	0.421***	0.574**	0.617**	0.539**	0.505***	0.463***
Perceptions of Friends' Substance Use	3.245***	3.691***	3.845***	1.716**	2.089***	1.345*
Perceptions of Friends' Positive School Experiences	1.050	0.989	0.990	0.826	0.951	0.808
Social Status of High Grades	0.766	0.730*	0.911	0.552**	0.908	1.035
Personal School Importance	0.870	1.036	1.069	1.111	0.831	0.845
Social Status of College Plans	1.627***	0.896	1.439*	1.316	1.196	1.262
Personal College Plans	0.980	1.316	0.827	0.747	0.885	0.960
Social Status of Sports	1.151	0.999	1.002	1.494	0.864	0.767
Personal Sports Importance	0.798	1.288	1.395	1.926**	1.284	1.412
Personal Sports Participation	1.033	0.964	0.667*	0.784	0.993	0.919
Grades by Social Status of Grades Interaction	1.046	1.323	1.208	0.758	0.816	0.785
Grades by Personal School Importance Interaction	0.738*	0.085	0.707*	1.310	1.088	0.975
Grades by Social Status of College Plans Interaction	0.919	1.089	0.867	1.102	1.693**	0.970
Grades by Personal College Plans Interaction	1.006	0.893	1.158	0.654*	0.733*	1.156
Grades by Social Status of Sports Interaction	0.729*	1.149	0.855	1.244	1.047	0.706**
Grades by Personal Sports Importance Interaction	1.407*	0.860	1.033	1.448	0.858	1.385*
Grades by Personal Sports Participation Interaction	1.226	1.202	1.255	0.665	1.112	0.894
Nagelkerke R ²	0.435	0.317	0.460	0.245	0.378	0.329

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

of friends as well as one's own achievement and college plans. In addition, it was posited that when adolescents perceive that the social status of sports is high, even after controlling for adolescents' own sports participation and importance, problem behavior would be higher overall as well. Lastly, it was hypothesized that high-achievers would be less vulnerable (and low-achievers more vulnerable) to problem behavior when academic success has high status, thus, achievement interactions were included in the logistic regressions as well. In sum, the second series of six separate logistic regressions included controls for parental education, gender, grade level, perceptions of friends behaviors, personal school importance, personal college plans, personal sports importance and participation. These logistic regressions examined the effects of adolescents' perceptions of the social status of high grades, college plans, and sports as predictors of whether or not adolescents have participated in the six problem behaviors. As in the previous regressions, achievement interactions were included as predictors of problem behavior as well (results are presented in Table 4).

Results

Academic Achievement Differences

Of the total sample, 378 (55.3%) adolescents reported grades of B or below (i.e., low-achievers), 294 (43.0%) adolescents reported grades of B+ or higher (i.e., high-achievers), and 11 (1.6%) adolescents were missing data on grades—splitting the sample in this way created the most even split of participants across the two groups (see Tables 1 and 2). Across all of the substance use and school misbehavior variables, low-achievers were more likely to report engaging in these behaviors than high-achievers. Among the predictors, high-achievers reported higher levels of the following variables as compared to low-achievers: parental education, academic achievement, popularity perceptions, seeing friends goals, goals to be social, social status importance of grades, personal school importance, personal college plans, social status importance of sports, personal sports importance, and sports participation. Low-achievers reported more friends' substance use than high-achievers.

Logistic Regressions

A series of separate multivariate logistic regressions were used to examine the individual effects of the predictors on the odds of reporting each of the problem behaviors; the predicted odds are presented in Tables 3 and 4. For the following logistic regression results, all of the Hosmer and Lemeshow χ^2 -tests were nonsignificant, indicating that the models fit the data well (Menard, 2002).

Intimacy and Status Social Goals as Predictors of Problem Behavior

Results¹ from the series of six separate logistic regressions that examined the intimacy (i.e., seeing friends goal) and status (i.e., popularity perception, popularity importance, and "to be social" goal) goals as predictors of adolescents' problem behaviors are presented below and in Table 3.

Ever used cigarettes. Adolescents who reported lower grades were about twice as likely (1/.41) to report that they have ever used cigarettes in their lifetime compared to those with higher grades, and those reporting that their friends use substances were 2.8 times more likely to report that they have used cigarettes themselves than those with fewer friends using substances. No achievement interactions were found. This model was a significant model, $\chi^2(14) = 223.32$, $p < .0001$, and the Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.403$.

Ever used alcohol. Similar to the results above, adolescents who reported lower grades and that their friends use substances were more likely to report that they have ever used alcohol in their lifetime. Adolescents who perceive that they are popular were 1.6 times more likely to report alcohol use than unpopular adolescents. The achievement by popularity importance interaction indicated that among high-achievers, popularity importance was associated with more alcohol use, however, among low-achievers, popularity importance was associated with somewhat less alcohol use (see Figure 1). This model was significant, $\chi^2(14) = 169.19$, $p < .0001$, and the Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.341$.

Ever used marijuana. Again, similar to the results above, adolescents with lower grades and with more friends who use substances were more likely to report that they had ever used marijuana. In addition, males were 1.8 times (1/.56) more likely to report that they have ever used marijuana in their lifetime than females. Adolescents who did not endorse having goals to see friends at school were 1.6 times (1/.62) more likely to report marijuana use than adolescents with goals to see friends. Adolescents who have a goal to be social in school were 1.7 times more likely to report marijuana use than adolescents not reporting these goals. No achievement interactions were found. This model was a significant model, $\chi^2(14) = 213.76$, $p < .0001$, and the Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.455$.

Cut classes during previous month. Similar to previous results, adolescents who reported lower grades and had more friends who used substances were more likely to have cut classes during the previous month. And, similar to previous results, adolescents who perceive they are popular

¹Although not central to the hypotheses, gender by intimacy and status social goal interactions were examined in additional analyses. Across the six problem behavior outcomes with four gender interaction terms for each set of analyses, only one gender interaction was found and this pattern was not replicated across any of the other problem behaviors.

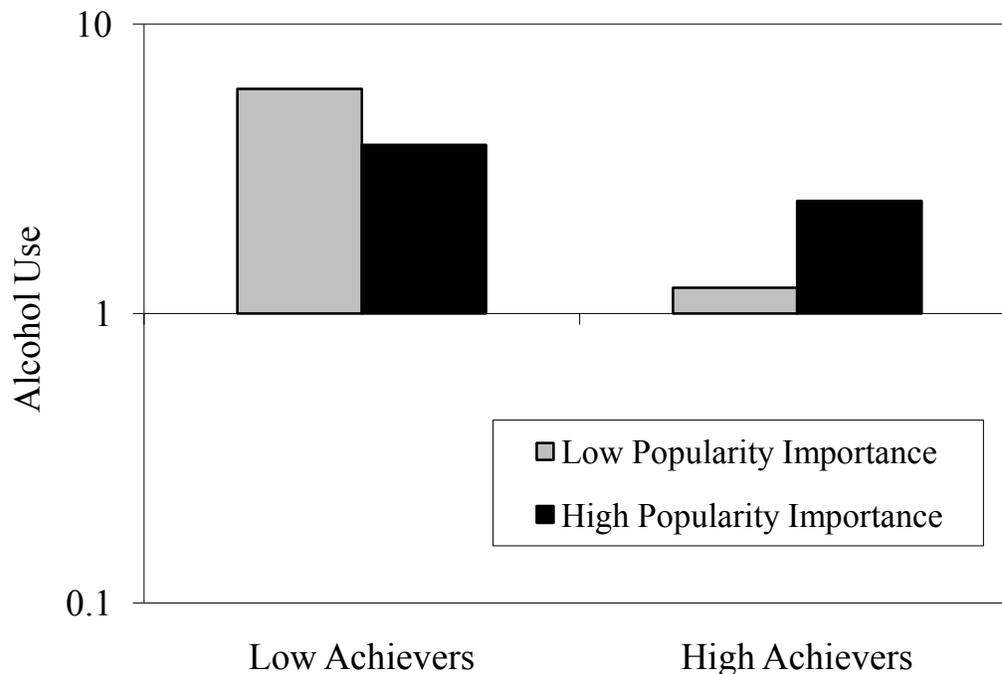


Figure 1. Likelihood of ever having used alcohol among low and high achievers reporting low and high levels of popularity importance. This is a logarithmic scale. Scores less than one indicate lower odds of behavior, scores greater than one indicate a greater odds of behavior.

were more likely to report cutting classes than unpopular adolescents. No achievement interactions were found. This model was a significant model, $\chi^2(14) = 59.22$, $p < .0001$, and the Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.214$.

Misbehaved in school during previous year. Similar to previous results, adolescents who reported lower grades and that more of their friends use substances were more likely to report school misbehavior. Males were also over 3 times (1/.30) more likely than females to report that they have been sent to the office or had to stay after school because they misbehaved during the previous year. Eighth graders were 1.6 times (1/.63) more likely to report school misbehavior than ninth graders. Two achievement interactions were found. Placing high importance on being popular was a risk factor for school misbehavior for high-achievers, and somewhat protective against school misbehavior for low-achievers (note the similar interaction for alcohol use, see Figure 1). The grades by being social goal interaction indicated that having a high being social goal was a risk factor for school misbehavior for low-achievers, but was somewhat protective for high-achievers. This model was a significant model, $\chi^2(14) = 209.97$, $p < .0001$, and the Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.383$.

Ever been suspended or expelled. As in all previous models, adolescents with lower grades were more likely to have ever been suspended or expelled. In addition, males were 4 times (1/.25) as likely as females to report that they have ever been suspended or expelled in their lifetime. No achievement interactions were found. This model was

a significant model, $\chi^2(14) = 129.38$, $p < .0001$, and the Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.309$.

Social Status of Academics and Sports as Predictors of Problem Behavior

Results² from the series of six separate logistic regressions that examined the social status of academics and the social status of sports as predictors of problem behaviors are presented below. Given that parental education, gender, grade level, achievement, perceptions of friends' substance use, and perception of friends' positive experiences are controls in these models, as well as, the models previously presented; significant associations will not be repeated when they are in agreement with the findings already reported above. Results are summarized in Table 4.

Ever used cigarettes. Unlike the previous model of cigarette use, in this multivariate model, eighth graders were more likely to report cigarette use than ninth graders (t -tests

²Again, although not central to the hypotheses, gender by social status of academics and sports interactions were also examined in additional analyses. Across the six problem behavior outcomes with seven interaction terms for each set of analyses, only 8 interactions were found and they were in two distinct patterns. Perceiving that having good grades was important for social status at school was more of a protective factor for girls and more of a risk factor for boys in terms of their likelihood of ever using cigarettes, alcohol, and marijuana. For boys, perceiving a high social status associated with college plans was more protective against use of the same substances, and more of a risk factor for substance use for girls.

did not confirm these differences). Adolescents reporting that college plans contribute greatly to social status in school were 1.6 times more likely to smoke cigarettes than those who report that college plans are less important for social status. Three achievement interactions were also found. The achievement by personal school importance interaction indicated that for high-achievers, high school importance was protective against cigarette use, however, for low-achievers placing high importance on schooling was a risk factor for cigarette use (note that the same interaction was found for marijuana use). The grades by social status of sports interaction revealed that low-achieving adolescents who believe that sports are important for social status at school are more at risk for cigarette use than low-achieving adolescents who do not hold these beliefs and also high-achieving adolescents in general; this belief was protective for high-achieving adolescents in terms of cigarette use (note that the same was found for suspensions and expulsions, see below and Figure 2). However, low-achievers who believe that sports are less important to them than to other adolescents were more likely to have tried cigarettes than low-achievers who think sports are important and also more likely than high-achievers in general; for high-achievers, sports importance was not associated with whether they had ever tried cigarette use. This model was a significant model, $\chi^2(20) = 244.47, p < .0001$, and the Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.435$.

Ever used alcohol. Females were about 1.8 times more likely to report that they have used alcohol in their lifetime than males in this multivariate model (univariate chi square tests and the previous multivariate model of alcohol use revealed no gender differences). Adolescents who believe that grades are less important for social status at school were 1.4 times (1/.73) more likely to report alcohol use than adolescents who thought that grades were more important for social status at school. No achievement interactions were found. This model was a significant model, $\chi^2(20) = 155.45, p < .0001$, and the Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.317$.

Ever used marijuana. Unlike the previous model of marijuana use, participants reporting higher levels of parental education were more likely to report that they had ever used marijuana as compared to participants with lower levels of marijuana use. Similar to the cigarette use model, adolescents who perceived that college plans are important for social status at school were more likely to report marijuana use than adolescents who thought that college plans were not important for social status. In addition, participants who report high levels of sports participation were 1.5 times less likely to have ever tried marijuana than those who have low levels of sports participation. The achievement by school importance interaction was in the same pattern as this interaction for cigarette use. This model was a significant model, $\chi^2(20) = 215.51, p < .0001$, and the Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.460$.

Cut classes during previous month. As in previous models, adolescents who perceive that grades are not important for social status were twice as likely to report cutting classes than those who reported that grades are important for social status. Adolescents who reported that sports are more important to them than to other adolescents were twice as likely to cut classes than those who reported that sports are not important. Achievement interactions indicated that having personal plans to attend college is a protective factor for cutting classes among high-achievers but not among low-achievers. This model was a significant model, $\chi^2(20) = 68.17, p < .0001$, and the Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.245$.

Misbehaved in school during previous year. No new main effects were found beyond the ones mentioned in the previous school misbehavior model. However, achievement interactions revealed that perceiving that college plans are important for social status at school is a risk factor for high-achievers, however, it is a protective factor for school misbehavior for low-achievers. In contrast with this and similar to the findings for cutting class, actually having college plans is protective against school misbehavior for high-achievers but not for low-achievers. This model was a significant model, $\chi^2(20) = 206.51, p < .0001$, and the Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.378$.

Ever been suspended or expelled. No new main effects were found beyond the previous suspensions/expulsions model, however, an achievement by social status of sports interaction was found that was in the same pattern as the cigarette use interaction. As indicated in Figure 2, placing a low importance on sports for social status in school was associated with reporting more suspensions and expulsions among high-achievers, whereas, no differences were found for low-achievers. In contrast, actually thinking that sports are important personally was protective against being suspended for high-achievers but not for low-achievers. This model was significant, $\chi^2(20) = 138.17, p < .0001$, and the Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.329$.

Discussion

The current research indicates that adolescents' social goals and their perceptions of what is needed for social status at school do relate to whether or not they engage in problem behavior even after accounting for friends' behaviors. The pattern of results suggests that social goals and perceptions of social status have differential links to problem behaviors depending upon the aspects of the social factors (i.e., intimacy vs. status goals; social status of grades; college plans vs. sports), the achievement level of the students, and the type of problem behavior considered. Status social goals where adolescents think it is important to be popular are generally associated with more problem behavior, and intimacy social goals to see friends are

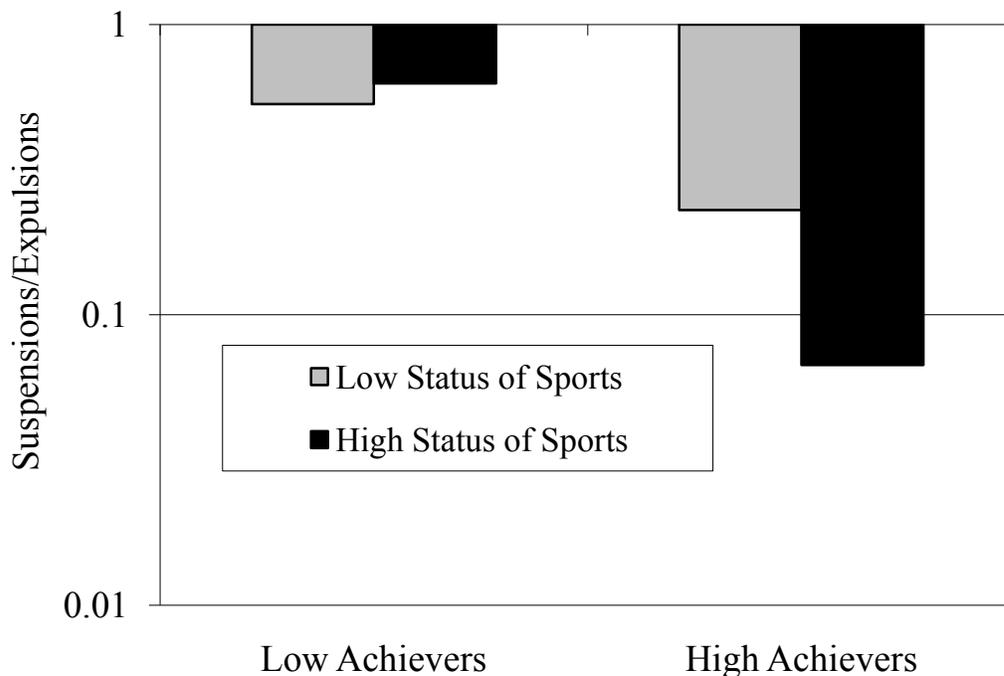


Figure 2. Likelihood of ever having been suspended or expelled among low and high achievers perceiving low and high levels of social status in school associated with sports participation. This is a logarithmic scale. Scores closer to one indicate greater odds of behavior; scores further from one (smaller) indicate lower odds of behavior.

associated with less problem behavior, although, fewer effects were found for this single indicator of intimacy social goals. These findings overall are consistent with Xie and colleagues' (2006) research that suggests that being popular is increasingly associated with deviant behavior as youth mature. Nevertheless, when adolescents perceive that grades are important for being popular and having status in their school, they are less likely to be involved in problem behavior. In contrast, the current research indicates that when adolescents perceive that planning to go to college is what is needed to be socially successful, they are more likely to be involved with substance use—it may be that these environments are more competitive and stressful for all youth regardless of achievement. Perceptions of the social status of sports differed in their connections with problem behaviors depending upon adolescents' level of achievement. When low-achievers perceive that it is the athletes who have high status in school, they are more likely to be involved with problem behavior, whereas, high-achievers with the same perceptions are less likely to be involved with problem behavior. As in previous research on national samples (e.g., Videon, 2002), high-achievers in the current rural sample are more likely to participate in sports; this research also indicates that they are more likely to think that sports are important.

Intimacy and Status Social Goals

In this study, having intimacy goals to see friends is more protective against adolescents' problem behavior

than having status goals to be popular, although, what it means to be social is different for low-achievers and high-achievers. In general, when adolescents think that it is very important to be social and they do not have intimacy social goals to see friends at school, this is associated with greater use of marijuana, the least common of the three substances; consistent with the hypotheses that only less prevalent problem behaviors would be associated with intimacy goals. These findings suggest that adolescents who are social isolates may be at particular risk for trying less common substances perhaps to cope or to stand out from their peers. Carroll and colleagues (2003) found that adolescents who are involved in less common problem behaviors see themselves as nonconformists and they want to be viewed in this way by others. With more prevalent problem behaviors, namely alcohol use, cutting classes, and school misbehavior, thinking you are popular was a risk factor for both low- and high-achievers (consistent with the hypotheses); however, only high-achievers were put more at risk by thinking that popularity is important, low-achievers were not (also consistent with the hypotheses). Because sociometrically popular high-achievers engage in more risky behaviors than unpopular high-achievers (de Bruyn & Cillessen, 2006), when achievers really think it is important to be popular, engaging in school misbehavior or alcohol use may be part of the way they try to fit in. It is popularity importance that is a risk for high-achievers and wanting to be social that is the risk for low-achievers. It is

likely that how high-achievers and low-achievers go about “being social” differs. More research is needed to examine how youth in these groups make efforts to gain social status among their peers.

Perceptions of the Social Status of Academics and Sports

When adolescents perceive high grades as a key indicator of social status at school, they are less involved with problem behavior compared to when they view college plans as more important. Classrooms that highlight learning rather than going to college may be less stressful and more inclusive, particularly in small rural schools where college plans are less common than in suburban areas (Sarigiani et al., 1990). This research indicates that even though high-achievers had more college plans, in a context where college plans are key for popularity, high-achievers were more likely to report misbehavior. When small schools publicize students’ individual college plans or acceptances and have college tracks, this may promote stress and competition among students. Competitive environments are conducive to problem behaviors (Anderman et al., 1998; Ludden & Eccles, 2007). As in previous research (i.e., Bryant & Zimmerman, 2002), the current research revealed that when high-achievers have low motivation (i.e., low school importance and fewer personal college plans), they are more likely to use substances and misbehave; low motivation was not a risk factor for low-achievers. Unmotivated achievers may spend time with peers who are delinquent and not engaged at school. Motivated low-achievers, in contrast, are more at risk than their unmotivated counterparts; possibly because they have been unsuccessful in school and have aspirations that are out of reach.

Not only are high-achievers put at risk when they do not think school is important, they are also at risk for cigarette use and suspensions when they value sports personally. These findings may tie in with the findings on motivation discussed above; focusing on sports may detract from adolescents’ achievement motivation in school and affect their engagement in problem behavior. Conversely, when high-achievers report that doing sports is what is important for having high status at school, they are less likely to have used cigarettes or been suspended, unlike low-achievers with these perceptions who are more likely to have used cigarettes or been suspended. For high-achievers, having a sports-oriented school may alleviate academically induced pressure. Athletes are more often high-achievers as well, thus, low-achievers are at particular risk for problem behavior as they may feel marginalized when they perceive that athletes are the most popular students in a small school setting. When high-achievers and athletes dominate the social environment, low-achievers may have difficulty fitting in and may choose to try to stand out through misbehavior and socializing with delinquent peers.

In a small, rural school where students, teachers, and parents are quite familiar with one another, it may be hard for adolescents to feel as though they can shift their position in an established social hierarchy. The results from the current research suggest that adopting status social goals, that is, wanting to be social or popular, puts adolescents at an increased risk for engaging in problem behaviors. As in previous research that suggests that high-achievers who want to be or who are popular may use problem behavior to increase their social status (e.g., Crosnoe, 2011; de Bruyn & Cillessen, 2006), the current research suggests that these same processes can be found among rural adolescents in small school settings. This is also consistent with Farmer and colleagues’ (2011) findings that jockeying for social status may be particularly prevalent in small school rural settings where adolescents are with the same students in their classrooms year after year. Problem behavior may serve as a way for adolescents to stand out among the peers they have known for years and to shift their social status.

Limitations

The current research does have a number of limitations. First, many of the measures in the study are based on single-item responses. One of the single-item social goals measures asks adolescents whether they go to school to “be social.” The results suggest, although, this was not considered here, that low-achievers and high-achievers have different ideas about what it means to “be social” in school. For high-achievers, this may mean making prosocial connections with highly motivated friends who are active in school activities; for low-achievers, this may involve making connections with friends through involvement in problem behaviors at school. The research provides further support that a deeper investigation is needed of the social factors behind problem behaviors in and outside of school. Second, the current research is only based on adolescents’ reports of their own attitudes and behaviors, and their perceptions of others. Ennett and colleagues (2006) found that when peers indicated that particular adolescents had high status, these high status adolescents were more likely to drink, but less likely to increase their marijuana use over time. Pairing sociometric information with information from the current study would clarify how actual social status and perceived social status characteristics contribute to adolescents’ involvement in substance use and school misbehavior. Third, girls are somewhat overrepresented among the participants and these participants are all from small, rural schools where the families had somewhat similar social class backgrounds; thus, the generalizability of this research may be limited to rural youth from small, working class towns. Additional indicators of social class beyond parental educational would be beneficial; social class is associated with both rural adolescents’ personal educational aspirations as well as the social environment of achievement in rural

schools (Henry et al., 2011; Irvin et al., 2011). Fourth, this research makes use of data collected at one point in time—research on rural adolescents indicates that their perceptions of school belonging as well as their achievement and misbehavior fluctuate during middle school and high school (Witherspoon & Ennett, 2011). Considering trajectories of problem behavior and perceptions of social goals over multiple time points during adolescence would help to unveil patterns of change and temporal relationships among these factors.

Implications for Prevention and Future Research

Adolescents' social reasons for going to school and their beliefs about popularity are associated with both their substance use and school problem behaviors, thus prevention programs would do well to account for the social context of problem behavior. The social connections that adolescents make at school provide them with emotional support and protection against health risks, and also expose them to problem behaviors and provide a context for engagement in these behaviors. Connecting the current findings with adolescent research on perceptions of what it takes to be popular (e.g., Xie et al., 2006), the motivational environment of school misbehavior (e.g., Anderman et al., 1998), and reasons for substance use (e.g., Maggs, 1997), may unveil how peer environments and school social dynamics contribute to adolescents' problem behavior.

Rural youth who are at-risk academically may not be served well by small schools that emphasize competition, whether it be in sports or planning for college. They need to connect with the school setting in some way. In small, rural communities where the school is the social hub for adolescents—bonding to school and finding support from peers and teacher, are key for promoting resilience (Hardré et al., 2009; Shears et al., 2006). Schools not only need to provide many different types of prosocial opportunities for students, they also need to ensure that low-achievers (and high-achievers) are not marginalized (Crosnoe, 2011). If we can find ways for more adolescents to shine academically and socially, problem behaviors will be less common.

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