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Intimacy, identity and status: Measuring dating goals in late adolescence and emerging adulthood

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Abstract Individuals' goals can direct their own social behavior and development. We extended and validated a social dating goals measure (SDGS-R) to assess identity, intimacy and status goals, and compared goals by age, gender, sexual orientation and romantic status. Participants were 121 adolescents and 249 emerging adults (age $M = 20.6$). The expected 3-factor structure of the SDGS-R was found and confirmed (18 items). Identity, intimacy and status goals had small correlations with each other and analyses validated the meaning and uniqueness of each goal. Participants reported more identity and intimacy goals than status goals. Intimacy goals were more prominent among older compared to teenage participants and those with a partner rather than without one. Females reported more identity dating goals than males. There was no difference in the goals of same-sex and other-sex attracted youth. The availability of the SDGS-R will allow further study of romantic development and relationship functioning.

Keywords Dating · Romantic relationships · Identity · Intimacy · Status · Sexual orientation · Sexual behavior

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Introduction

Young people approach dating and romance with a variety of concerns and social dating goals (Cantor et al. 1992). In fact, young people commit high levels of cognitive and emotional energy into forming, maintaining or disengaging from dating and romantic relationships (Collins and Madsen 2006; Furman et al. 1999; Larson et al. 1999), meaning that they are active agents in their own interpersonal development (Lerner and Busch-Rossnagel 1981; Wrosch and Heckhausen 1999; Zimmer-Gembeck 1999) and are likely to be guided by their goals for dating (Sanderson and Cantor 1995). Multiple social dating goals have been identified as important to the adolescent and early adult dating experience. These goals have included intimacy, self-focused identity (Sanderson and Cantor 1995; Zimmer-Gembeck and Petherick 2006), love, sex, fun, to learn, to impress others, to gain access to partners' resources (see Clark et al. 1999), to reduce uncertainty, to have companionship, sexual activity, and social status (see Mongeau et al. 2004; Ott et al. 2006).

Sanderson and Cantor (1995) provided one of the most prominent views on social dating goals, which they founded in a motivational life-task perspective. From this perspective, goals provide meaning to individual life experiences through motivating, channeling and organizing behavior (Sanderson and Cantor 1995; see also Zimmer-Gembeck and Petherick 2006). Attention is focused on the broader challenges or tasks individuals may be working on in their daily lives, and the specific strategies, or goals, they bring to these activities in attempts to resolve them (Cantor and Langston 1989; Cantor and Sanderson 1998; Sanderson and Cantor 1995). This approach acknowledges the important roles that motivations can play in shaping individual cognition, emotion and behavior (Heckhausen and Dweck 1998).

Despite descriptions of a variety of dating goals and early emphasis of Sanderson and Cantor (1995) on social dating goals, very little research has assessed dating goals or examined how they are associated with actual romantic behavior. Moreover, little research has addressed how dating goals and behavior uniquely and interactively account for satisfaction and other outcomes in multiple domains of life. There is one very good reason that such research has not been conducted. There is currently no available measure that assesses more than intimacy dating goals, which can easily be administered to adolescents or emerging adults who are or are not involved in romantic relationships.

The aim of the current study was to develop a measure that could capture youth's *multiple* goals for dating in order to allow for the possibility of having multiple goals simultaneously and to allow for future research on individual differences between goals and their correlates. This focus on dating goals did have a foundation in previous theory and research. For example, Sanderson and Cantor (1995) developed the Social Dating Goals Scale (SDGS) to measure a single dimension of dating goals using a 13-item scale that represented intimacy (9 items) as opposed to identity (4 items) social dating goals. One purpose of the current study was to modify and expand the SDGS in order to clarify whether intimacy and identity represent two distinct dating goals rather than a single goal and to also assess status social dating goals. The identification of these three goals was founded on romantic developmental theory in order to include those that coincided with some of the key functions of dating at different stages of adolescent and young adult development (Brown 1999; Connolly and Goldberg 1999; Zimmer-Gembeck and Gallaty 2006).

Social dating goals

Intimacy and identity social dating goals

Two of the most salient life-tasks during the adolescent and early adult years are identity and intimacy. Sanderson and Cantor (1995) argued that these two life-tasks can channel and organize behavior and, given the importance of dating and the formation of couple relationships at this time of life, they applied this to the study of social dating. Some adolescents were expected to seek more intimacy within dating relationships than others. Intimacy goals were defined as seeking mutual dependence, open communication, self-disclosure and emotional attachment. Young people with more intimacy dating goals would be expected to place more importance on developing and maintaining exclusive, committed, close relationships with a single partner. However, for some young people dating may instead or also provide an outlet for identity goals. Sanderson and Cantor (1995) described *identity* dating goals as those that are self-focused and involve a mix of concerns related to identity formation (e.g., understanding personal preferences), self-exploration and autonomy (see also Zimmer-Gembeck and Petherick 2006). Therefore, young people may approach social dating with a different motivational emphasis, depending on their goals.

The emphasis was on differential intimacy versus self-focused identity social dating goals in the original formulation of the SDGS. Such a tradeoff between intimacy and identity was founded on theory that conceived of them as somewhat in opposition (Sanderson and Cantor 1995; Zirkel and Cantor 1990). This is consistent with the view of phases of romantic relationship development, in which the earlier phases of infatuation and affiliation may be marked by more focus on the self, self-identity and developing personal competencies and only in the later phases do goals of intimacy and commitment become more prominent (Brown 1999; Connolly and Goldberg 1999).

On the other hand, the possibility of holding both intimacy and identity goals simultaneously cannot be dismissed. Recent research (Zimmer-Gembeck and Petherick 2006) has raised questions about combining items that tap intimacy and identity items to form one measure of social dating goals that reflects either relatively higher intimacy goals combined with relatively lower identity goals, or the converse. Research on patterns of adolescent identity development (e.g., Meeus et al. 1999) and relationship maturity in late adolescence (Paul and White 1990; White et al. 1987, 1986) has provided support for the simultaneous development of identity and intimacy during adolescence and emerging adulthood. Moreover, Connolly and Goldberg (1999) and Connolly and McIsaac (2009) suggest that identity goals come into the forefront in late adolescence, once adolescents have begun to experience intimacy in relationships. Finally, research has supported the possibility that autonomy and relatedness to others are not in opposition (Zimmer-Gembeck and Collins 2003; Zimmer-Gembeck et al. 2011), and some items that assessed identity goals on the original SDGS may be more appropriately referred to as autonomy goals. Overall, assessing intimacy in opposition to identity (or autonomy) goals limits the ability of researchers to examine developmental progression and does not allow the investigation of how combinations of these goals may be associated with individual behaviors and functioning.

Status social dating goals

In addition to the social dating goals of intimacy and identity, romantic developmental theories also raise the possibility that young people may date with the goal of maintaining or seeking status with their peers or in wider

society. For example, two theories (Brown 1999; Connolly and Goldberg 1999) have identified either an *affiliative* or a *status* phase of romantic development. When in these phases, social validation and group status are expected to be core motivations and individual goals. Moreover, a study of narrative accounts of dating identified impressing others outside the relationship as an important goal to relationship initiation (Clark et al. 1999) and multiple authors list status or access to social resources as a possible dating goal (Clark et al. 1999; Ott et al. 2006). Dating relationships may be an important way to initiate or maintain social status making it possible that status social dating goals exist for many young people. *Status* social dating goals were defined here as concerns with social validation and increasing peer group and societal status.

Study aims and hypotheses

In sum, having a valid instrument that can reliably measure multiple social dating goals is a critical step towards research to identify how adolescents differ in their approaches to romantic relationships, how their romantic relationship goals may differ by age and over time, and whether different goals may impact their behavior and better account for patterns of individual and relationship functioning both concurrently and over time.

The first aim of this study was modify and expand the SDGS (Sanderson and Cantor 1995) to balance the number of items that measured intimacy and identity goals and to develop new items to assess status goals. The resulting factor structure of the new measure was then examined, and was anticipated to conform to a three-dimensional factor structure; one factor representing *intimacy social dating goals*, a second factor representing *identity social dating goals,* and a third factor representing *status social dating goals*. The convergent and discriminant validity of the subscales also were investigated.

Finally, social dating goals were also compared by age, gender, dating status, and between same- and other-sex attracted young people. These comparisons were conducted to examine how dating goals differ between the teenage years and the early 20's, as romantic relationships may differ between these age groups (Connolly and Goldberg 1999). In particular, we expected that identity and status goals would be more prominent in the teen years compared to the early 20's, with intimacy goals higher in the early 20's compared to in the teen years. We also expected more intimacy goals to be found among participants with steady romantic partners compared to those without partners. It was not clear whether any gender or sexual orientation differences would be found, but we wanted this measure to be representative of the dating goals of males and females, and of both other-sex and same-sex attracted youth. Therefore, we compared males and females and we oversampled youth with same-sex attraction.

Method

Participants and procedure

Participants were 121 late adolescents (aged 16–19 years) and 249 emerging adults (aged 20–25 years) (age $M = 20.6$, SD = 3.8; 34% male). Participants resided in Australia and were predominantly White/Caucasian (83%). Others reported their sociocultural background as Asian (10%), Aboriginal or Pacific Islander (3%), and other (4%). Most lived with at least one parent (51%) or with flatmates (33%). A minority (11%) lived with a romantic partner, but almost 50% ($n = 184$) reported a current romantic partner and 93% had a history of at least one steady romantic partner.

Overall, 71% of participants were University students. However, to have more representation of nonstudents and to increase participation of same-sex attracted youth, participants also were recruited via advertising in community settings and were recruited from organizations attended by high numbers of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) youth. This resulted in 29% of participants who were not students and 25% who reported that they were sexually attracted to the same sex or to both sexes.

Prior to commencing the survey, an information sheet was provided to participants. To manage the length of the questionnaire, all participants completed questions about social dating goals. However, two alternative versions of the questionnaire were used. The first 45% of participants reported their dating goals plus completed five convergent and divergent validity measures. The measures included sociotropy-autonomy, importance of intimacy, a psychosocial inventory, attachment, and neuroticism. The remaining 65% of participants reported their dating goals and completed four validity measures. This second version included validity measures of sociotropy-autonomy, social capital seeking, sexual dating goals, and sexual behavior.

There were no differences in dating goals between students and nonstudents or between those who completed the different versions of the survey. There were differences in intimacy and status dating goals depending on whether the participant was a student or not, with higher intimacy goals among nonstudents ($M = 4.1$ for nonstudents and 3.9 for students, $p < .05$) and higher status goals among students ($M = 3.0$ for students vs. 2.8 for non students, $p = .05$). However, when age was adjusted there were no differences in dating goals between students and nonstudents, because nonstudents were older than students; 10% of teens were not students, whereas 35% of those 20–25 years were not

students. No other demographic differences were found when students and nonstudents were compared. Also, there were no differences in goals when reports from the two versions of the questionnaire were compared.

Development of the Social Dating Goals Scale—Revised (SDGS-R)

The original SDGS had nine items that assessed intimacy dating goals and four items that assessed identity dating goals. Items were not dependent on being in a steady dating relationship or having a history of dating. To achieve the first aim of this study, items expected to tap identity and status social dating goals were created and added to these original SDGS items. Sixteen new items were generated to assess identity dating goals (6 items) and status dating goals (10 items). The development of conceptually and culturally appropriate items was assisted by a review of the literature and informal interviews with a convenience sample of five males and five females, all between the ages of 19 and 22 years. Participants were asked open-ended questions about what they hoped for and wanted in their dating relationships and how they saw their roles within their dating relationships. New items were generated and were carefully scrutinized by a panel of three professors expert in adolescent romantic relationships, sexuality and measurement to determine face validity and clarity. Combining new items with the original items from the SDGS resulted in 29 items, which were expected to yield three factors. Items began with the stem "In my dating relationships, I…", and were positively worded. The response options ranged from 1 (*disagree strongly*) to 5 (*agree strongly*).

Validation measures

Preference for affiliation and independent goal attainment

All 370 participants completed the Revised Sociotropy-Autonomy Scale (Bieling et al. 2000). This scale included an 11-item preference for affiliation subscale and an 11-item independent goal attainment subscale, which were expected to converge with intimacy dating goals and identity dating goals, respectively. Responses ranged from 1 *(disagree strongly)* to 5 *(agree strongly).* Some example items are, "I often find myself thinking about friends or family" (preference for affiliation), and "I enjoy accomplishing things more than being given credit for them" (independent goal attainment). Items on each subscale were averaged and higher scores on these measures signified stronger preferences for affiliation or a stronger desire to achieve independent goals. Cronbach's α's attained in this study were $\alpha = .78$ for preference for affiliation and $\alpha = .82$ for independent goal attainment.

Importance of intimacy

The first 162 participants completed the importance dimension of the intimacy subscale of Sternberg's (1997) Triangular Love Scale was included. This subscale consists of 15 items that assess the degree of importance of certain aspects of intimate relationships, and was expected to converge with intimacy dating goals. An example item is, "In my romantic relationships it is important to feel emotionally close to my partner." Responses ranged from 1 (*extremely unimportant*) to 7 (*extremely important*). Items were averaged and higher scores indicated a greater focus on the importance of intimacy within dating relationships. In the current study, the Cronbach's α was .96.

Psychosocial development

The first 162 participants completed the intimacy and identity subscales of the Erikson Psychosocial Inventory (Rosenthal et al. 1981). This scale was developed in Australia for use with participants aged 12–25. Each subscale has 12 items with response options from 1 (*disagree strongly*) to 5 (*agree strongly*). Example items include, "I care deeply for others" (intimacy), and "I've got it together" (identity). These two scales were expected to converge with intimacy and identity dating goals, respectively. Items were averaged and higher scores on each scale reflected more psychosocial development. Cronbach's α's obtained in the current study were .75 for intimacy and .86 for identity.

Attachment

The first 162 participants completed the multi-item measure of the Experiences in Close Relationships Scale (Brennan et al. 1998). This measure included two 18-item scales measuring intimacy avoidance and anxiety, which were expected to be negatively associated with intimacy dating goals and to be uncorrelated (diverge) from identity and status goals. Responses ranged from 1 (*disagree strongly*) to 7 (*agree strongly*). Example items include, "I prefer not to show a partner how I feel deep down" (avoidance), and "I worry a lot about my relationships" (anxiety). Appropriate items were averaged to form scores with higher scores indicating more avoidance or anxiety. Cronbach's α were .93 for avoidance and .91 for anxiety.

Social capital seeking

The final 208 participants completed 12 items from the Personal Social Capital Scale (Chen et al. 2009) to measure social capital seeking. These items had to modified to fit our younger sample. The original measure captured routine

contact with family, relatives, friends and others, as well as whether these social contacts possessed political power, wealth, connections to others, high reputation, high education, and professional positions. To make this more applicable to our younger sample and to be more consistent with social status seeking, this measure was modified to focus only on current friends and we added six items to focus on desired friends and other contacts. Hence, the participants rated their friends on six items including whether they were financially well off, powerful, had broad social connections, were influential, had high education, and were employed in professional positions. An example item is "How many of your friends have the following?…Good education." Participants then responded to the same items thinking about the characteristics of the people they would like to spent time with or get to know better. An example item is "When you think about the types of people you would like to spend time with or get to know better, how many have the following…broad social connections." Response options for all 12 items ranged from 1 *(None)* to 5 *(All)*. All items were averaged with higher scores indicating stronger status seeking behaviors. In the present study, the Cronbach's α was .90.

Neuroticism

As a divergent validity measure, the first 162 participants completed 12 items that measured neuroticism from the Short-scale Eysenck Personality Questionnaire—Revised (Eysenck et al. 1985). Participants were asked to quickly offer Yes/No (coded as Yes = 1, No = 0) responses to questions that asked about the presence of certain personality attributes; an example being, "Would you call yourself tense or 'highly strung'?" Items were averaged and participants who obtained higher scores on this measure exhibited a stronger presence of the neuroticism personality trait. The Cronbach's α was .81 in the current study.

Sexual dating goals

As a divergent validity measure, the final 208 participants completed five items that were developed to measure sexual pleasure relationship goals (Ott et al. 2006). Participants rated these goals on an 11-point scale ranging from 0 = *not important* to 10 = *extremely important*. An example item included "How important is it to…be in a sexual relationship." Items that indicated gender (e.g., "boyfriend") were adapted to be gender neutral to suit the diverse gender and sexual identities of our participants. Items were averaged with higher scores indicating more sexual dating goals. Cronbach's α attained in the current study was .80.

Sexual behavior

As a divergent validity measure, the final 208 participants reported their 2-year history of eight behaviors from romantic kissing to sexual intercourse. To gauge frequency, and in accordance with other sexual behavior research (e.g., Hillier et al. 2005), responses ranged from 1 *(never)* to 7 *(almost every day)*. Items were averaged with higher scores indicating a greater frequency of sexual behavior. Cronbach's α obtained in the current study was .88.

Results

Item analyses, factor analyses and reliability of the SDGS-R

A random 250 participants was selected from the larger group of 370 for inclusion in the initial analysis. The remaining 120 participants were held for a confirmatory factor analysis.

Item analysis and factor analyses

Prior to conducting principle axis factoring (PAF) with oblique rotation, assumptions of this analysis were first evaluated (Hair et al. 2006). Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant, χ^2 (406) = 2,730.3, $p < .01$, indicating an acceptable number of significant correlations among variables. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO) for the overall sample was good (.81).

The number of factors to extract was based on eigenvalues and the scree plot. Items were removed if they had low loadings (less than |.30|) on all factors or formed single-item factors. Eight factors were initially extracted. After removing seven items, six factors were extracted in a second analysis. However, the scree plot clearly indicated a 3-factor solution might be optimal; the first three factors had eigenvalues of 4.6, 2.7 and 2.4, which were much larger then the eigenvalues of the next three extracted factors (1.2, 1.1 and 1.0). Hence, a 3-factor solution was tested, which identified four additional items with low loadings. After their removal, the remaining 18 items were analyzed and this produced a clear 3-factor solution, accounting for 48.3% of the variance.

Table 1 displays the final factor loadings, eigenvalues and percentage of variance accounted for by each factor and factor loadings of the 18 items. The first factor consisted of six items developed to assess identity goals in social dating, with loadings from .39 to .84. This factor accounted for 20.7% of the variance in items (eigenvalue = 3.7) and was labeled *identity dating goals*.

Table 1 Sample 1 final factor loadings for the Social Dating Goals Scale—Revised (SDGS-R) ($N = 250$)

Factors (percentage of variance accounted for by one factor: eigenvalue) and shortened items		Factor loadings		
		Identity dating goals	Intimacy dating goals	Status dating goals
Factor 1: Identity goals (20.7%, 3.73)				
1	Want to do things on own	.84	−.05	−.05
2	Go with people who give me space for me	.76	.00	.09
3	Establish my individual identity	.71	.00	−.01
O4	Maintain strong sense of independence	.60	−.19	.05
5	Go with those who let me be me	.50	.19	−.08
O6	Maintain a focus on my other life goals	.39	.07	.09
Factor 2: Intimacy goals (14.7%, 2.64)				
O7	Consider boy/girlfriends(s) as best friend(s)	.14	.70	−.11
O8	Want to spend a lot of time with partner	.00	.61	.09
O9	Focus on possible future plans with boy/girlfriend(s)	−.03	.60	.14
O10	Want to take care of my girl/boyfriend(s)	.14	.57	−.11
O11	Share most intimate thoughts and feelings	−.08	.55	−.03
O12	Date those whom I might fall in love with	−.03	.51	.03
Factor 3: Status goals (12.9%, 2.32)				
13	Avoid people who aren't going places	−.08	.13	.75
14	Avoid people who aren't leaders	−.04	.03	.61
15	Go out with those who can afford a fun lifestyle	.02	−.09	.56
16	Go with people on the way up	.04	.09	.51
17	Set high social standards	.11	.08	.51
18	Go with people who look good	.02	−.12	.48

O indicates items on the original SDGS (Sanderson and Cantor 1995)

An example item is, "In my dating relationships…I want to establish my individual identity." Six items with loadings ranging from .51 to .70 loaded on a second factor labeled *intimacy dating goals,* all items were intimacy items from the original SDGS and accounted for a further 14.7% of the variance (eigenvalue = 2.64). An example item is, "In my dating relationships…I want to share my intimate thoughts and feelings." The final 6-item factor, labeled *status dating goals,* accounted for 12.9% of the variance (eigenvalue = 2.32), with loadings ranging from .48 to .75. An example item is, "In my dating relationships…I want to go out with people who are working their way up." Cronbach's α were good for the items loading on each of the three factors, $\alpha = .79$ for self-focused identity, .77 for intimacy, and .75 for status.

Confirmatory factor analyses

Confirmatory factor analysis of the 18-items was completed with the remaining 120 participants using AMOS with maximum likelihood estimation. The results confirmed the 3-factor structure (see Fig. 1) with all loadings .40 or above and an acceptable fit to the data, $\chi^2(132) = 160.9$, $p = .044$, CFI = .94, RMSEA = .04 (90% CI .01 to .06, $p = .69$). Cronbach's α for each factor was .74 for identity, .78 for intimacy, and .74 for status dating goals.

Descriptive statistics and validation of the SDGS-R subscales

Because the exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses were so similar, we validated the SDGS-R by conducting one set of analyses that included all available data. Descriptive statistics and correlations of the social dating goal subscales with other measures are presented in Table 2. Participants had high levels of both identity and intimacy dating goals, $M = 4.21$ and 4.01, respectively. They had moderate status dating goals, $M = 2.94$. Significant but small correlations were found between the three social dating goals subscales, r's ranged from .12 to .19, all $p < .05$ (see Table 2).

In support of the convergent validity of the identity subscale, it was associated with independent goal attainment and the identity component of psychosocial development, $r = .42$ and $r = .28$, respectively, both $p < .01$ (see Table 2). Moreover, as expected to support discriminant and divergent validity, the subscale of identity dating

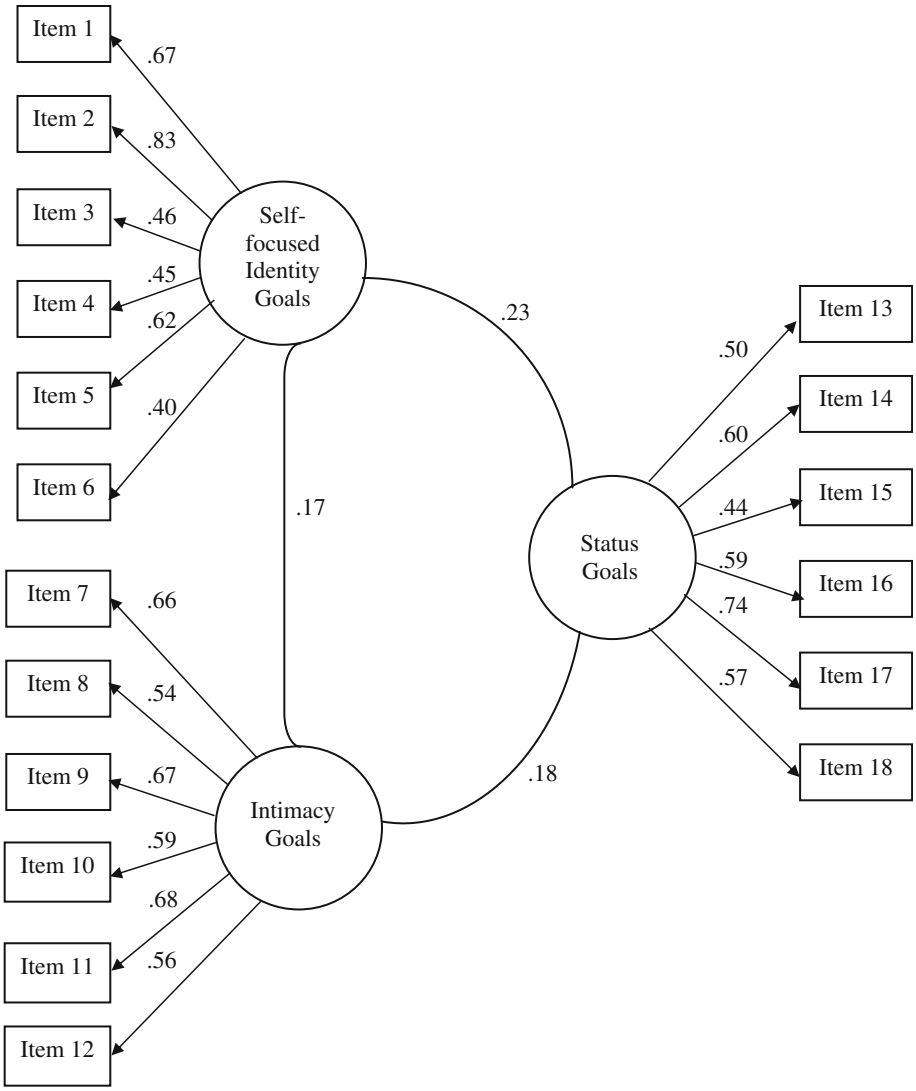

Fig. 1 Results of the confirmatory factor analysis of the SDGS-R ($N = 120$). *Note* $\chi^2(132) = 160.9$, $p = .044$, CFI = .94, RMSEA = .04 (90% CI .01 to .06, $p = .69$)

goals had one moderate (i.e., importance of intimacy, $r = .20$, $p < .05$) and one small association (psychosocial inventory—intimacy, $r = .17$, $p = .03$) with measures expected to be associated with other dating goals, and was not associated with neuroticism, sexual dating goals or sexual behavior.

In support of the convergent validity of the intimacy dating goals subscale, it was positively associated with preference for affiliation, the importance of intimacy, and the intimacy component of psychosocial development, *r*'s ranged from .32 to .48, all $p < .05$ (see Table 2). The intimacy dating goals subscale was also negatively associated with intimacy avoidance, $r = -.53$, $p < .001$. There was no association between intimacy dating goals and attachment anxiety. As expected to support discriminant and divergent validity, the subscale of intimacy dating goals was associated with only one measure that was expected to be associated with other dating goals (identity psychosocial development, $r = .20$, $p < .01$), and was not associated with neuroticism, sexual dating goals or sexual behavior.

Finally, also as anticipated, the status dating goals subscale was positively associated with social capital seeking, $r = .31$, $p < .05$, but it also had unexpected small associations with independent goal attainment, $r = .16$, $p < .05$, intimacy anxiety, $r = .18$, $p < .05$, neuroticism, $r = -.19$, $p < .05$, and sexual dating goals, $r = .15$, $p < .05$ (see Table 2). Nevertheless, as expected to support discriminant and divergent validity, the subscale of status dating goals was not associated with any other measure expected to be associated with identity or intimacy dating goals, and was not associated with sexual behavior.

Group differences in social dating goals

The final analyses compared the social dating goals of younger and older participants, males and females, same-sex and other-sex attracted youth, and those with and

Table 2 Descriptive statistics and Pearson's correlations between subscales of the Revised Social Dating Goals Scale (SDGS-R) and validity measures

	SDGS-R identity, *r*	SDGS-R intimacy, *r*	SDGS-R status, *r*
M (SD)[a]	4.21 (.56)	4.01 (.63)	2.94 (.73)
SDRS-R subscale intercorrelations[a]			
SDGS-R identity dating goals	–		
SDGS-R intimacy dating goals	.12*	–	
SDGS-R status dating goals	.19**	.13*	–
Convergent validation measures[a]			
Independent goal attainment[a]	.42**	.06	.16*
Psychosocial inventory—identity[b]	.28**	.20**	−.06
Preference for affiliation[a]	−.03	.32**	.10
Importance of intimacy[b]	.20*	.48**	.10
Psychosocial inventory—intimacy[b]	.17*	.34**	−.13
Attachment avoidance[b]	−.04	−.53**	.11
Attachment anxiety[b]	−.05	.10	.18*
Social capital seeking[c]	.10	−.07	.31**
Divergent validation measures			
Neuroticism[b]	−.04	−.09	−.19*
Sexual dating goals[c]	.05	.07	.15*
Sexual behavior[c]	−.01	.13	.03

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

[a] $N = 370$, [b] $N = 162$, [c] $N = 208$

without current steady romantic partners. To form age groups for comparison, age was dichotomized to compare those in their teen years to older participants. Participants 20 years or older reported more intimacy dating goals compared to those 19 or younger (see Table 3), whereas identity and status dating goals did not differ between the two age groups. When males and females were compared, females reported more identity dating goals than males, but there were no differences in intimacy and status dating goals. When same-sex and other-sex attracted youth were compared, no differences in dating goals were found. When participants who reported a current romantic partner were compared to those without one, only intimacy dating goals differed; those with a current partner reported more intimacy goals than those who did not have a current partner, but there was no difference in identity or status dating goals.

Within subject differences in goals

When identity, intimacy and status goals were compared *within* subjects, most participants had more self-focused identity than intimacy goals, and more intimacy than status goals. These within subject differences were found overall and also found when within subject comparisons were made in the following subgroups: younger participants, older participants, females, other-sex attracted participants, and those without current steady partners. For the remaining three subgroups (males, same-sex attracted participants, and those who reported current steady partners), the findings were differed for identity and intimacy goals, in that there were no within subject differences between identity and intimacy goals, but status goals were less prominent as was found in all other subgroups. Hence, these three subgroups of males, same-sex attracted youth and those not in relationships did stand out because they did not differ in their levels of identity and intimacy goals, but they did have fewer status goals, which was also found in all other subgroups.

Discussion

The primary objective of this study was to extend the scope of the Social Dating Goals Scale (SDGS) developed by Sanderson and Cantor (1995) with items to tap three different dating goals and to test the reliability and validity of this revised SDGS (SDGS-R). The development of this measure will be useful for future research designed to illuminate individual differences in romantic relationships while also mapping developmental patterns across adolescence and emerging/young adulthood. As a first step toward understanding individual differences in dating goals, we compared dating goals between teens and older

Table 3 Results of *t* tests comparing the social dating goals between groups based on age, gender, sexual orientation and romantic partner status ($N = 370$)

Groups	SDGS-R identity, *M* (SD)	SDGS-R intimacy, *M* (SD)	SDGS-R status, *M* (SD)
Younger (16–19 years), $n = 121$	4.14 (.58)	3.91 (.59)	2.92 (.71)
Older (20–25 years old), $n = 249$	4.21 (.52)	4.10 (.65)	2.96 (.75)
$t(368)$	2.09	2.90*	.58
Males, $n = 126$	4.08 (.56)	3.98 (.62)	3.02 (.73)
Females, $n = 244$	4.27 (.55)	4.03 (.64)	2.90 (.73)
$t(368)$	3.25*	.72	−1.53
Same-sex attracted, $n = 93$	4.19 (.58)	4.11 (.70)	2.87 (.74)
Other-sex attracted, $n = 277$	4.25 (.58)	4.06 (.68)	2.94 (.74)
$t(368)$	.24	−.31	1.10
Current steady romantic partner, $n = 184$	4.20 (.54)	4.17 (.59)	2.90 (.76)
No steady romantic partner, $n = 186$	4.21 (.57)	3.85 (.63)	2.98 (.70)
$t(368)$	.27	−5.19**	1.09

* $p < .01$

adolescents/emerging adults, males and females, same-sex and other-sex attracted young people adolescents, and those with or without a current steady partner.

The expected 3-factor structure of intimacy, identity and status dating goals was supported. Moreover, the three different goals had quite modest correlations with each other and showed patterns of correlations with other constructs that validated their meaning and their uniqueness. In general, although there were some weak unexpected correlations of status dating goals with some of the validity measures, each dating goals subscale showed good convergent, divergent and discriminant validity. On average, youth reported more identity and intimacy goals than status goals but even status goals were moderate. Although few age, gender, sexual orientation, and partner status differences in goals were found, more intimacy dating goals were reported by older (age 20–25 years) compared to teenage participants and those with a partner rather than without one. There was also one group difference in identity dating goals, with females reporting more than males. There was no differences in the goals of same-sex compared to other-sex attracted participants.

The development of the SDGS-R addressed three limitations of the original SDGS measure. The first limitation was the conceptualization and operationalization of identity and intimacy dating goals as opposite poles of a single continuum, rather than as two types of goals that might or might not exist simultaneously. This measurement structure placed a restriction on investigating concurrent low or high intimacy and identity dating goals making it impossible to examine individual differences in patterns of both dating goals. The current findings and the results of Killeya-Jones (2004) reveal that there is some justification in earlier conclusions that the original bipolar SDGS measure may have captured only one of the goals (intimacy dating goals) that young people have for their dating relationships and, by including intimacy items with identity items, may not have been the best measure of intimacy social dating goals.

Two methodological gaps addressed with this study were the over-representation of intimacy items on the original SDGS and the focus on only identity and intimacy goals, especially when multiple theories (Brown 1999; Connolly and Goldberg 1999) and other explanations of motivations for romance also identify status as a possible dating goal (Clark et al. 1999; Mongeau et al. 2004; Ott et al. 2006; Zimmer-Gembeck and Petherick 2006). Hence, we expected that increasing the number of identity items to match the number of intimacy items and including status items would allow for the assessment of three different social dating goals; this was supported here via both exploratory and confirmatory analyses. Overall, the final SDGS-R included 18 items with six items tapping each of the three social dating goals. All three of these subscales had good reliability as assessed with Cronbach's α, as well as convergent and discriminant validity.

The dating goals that can be measured with the SDGS-R will allow future research on both individual differences and development of dating goals to proceed. The results of the current cross-sectional study do suggest that developmental patterns occur making future longitudinal research critical. In particular, our findings point to identity goals as most salient for many late adolescents and emerging adults and indicate that intimacy goals are higher in the early 20's than in the teen years. Moreover, intimacy goals did not differ in prominence when compared to identity dating

goals for some subgroups. As has been previously argued (Connolly and Goldberg 1999; Connolly and McIsaac 2009), this suggests a developmental pattern from late adolescence to early adulthood that begins with the prominence of identity dating goals and these goals remain prominent even into early adulthood. However, intimacy goals could take on an increasingly prominent role as adolescents become adults, which remains to be tested in future research. The findings also suggest that particular groups or specific social experiences could account for different patterns of dating goals. Longitudinal research, which can account for both individual differences and changes in goals over time, will be necessary to clarify these patterns.

Males' and females' social dating goals were compared, also. Consistent with prior research (Sanderson and Cantor 1995; Zimmer-Gembeck and Petherick 2006), personal goals for intimate connection and status in dating relationships were important and did not differ for young men and women in the current sample. Yet, females reported more identity goals than males and females reported more identity than intimacy goals. In contrast, males reported fewer identity goals than females and their identity and intimacy goals did not differ. This finding is consistent with recent research that finds little support for the traditional view that males would report greater identity development or a greater focus on establishing their identities than females (e.g., Adams et al. 2001; Kerpelman and Schvaneveldt 1999; Kroger 2004; Lacombe and Gay 1998). In fact, it appears that it is females who are orienting toward self development within their dating relationships more than males. Overall, however, gender differences in dating goals are either small or nonexistent in contemporary adolescent and emerging adult romantic relationships (see also Adams et al. 2001). In addition, these findings are consistent with more present-day research that finds few or negligible sex differences when intimacy and identity development are compared in the late adolescent period (Kroger 2004).

When the goals of same- and other-sex attracted young people were compared, no differences were found. However, when analyses were conducted within subjects, same-sex attracted youth did not differ in their levels of identity and intimacy dating goals, whereas other-sex attracted youth clearly had more identity goals than intimacy goals. This finding suggests that young people may approach their dating relationships in similar ways regardless of whether they are attracted to the same or the other sex, but that the balance between identity and intimacy dating goals may slightly differ. Future research could employ the SDGS-R to assess dating goals among larger student and nonstudent populations, including those with same-sex attractions, to further examine why this pattern was found. It may be that same-sex attracted young people compared to other-sex attracted place more emphasis on their dating relationships as places for intimacy and support because of their more limited access to non-romantic friends whom they can rely on and disclose to.

Finally, having a steady romantic partner was associated with more prominent intimacy goals but those with and without partners did not differ in their identity or status dating goals. Moreover, when within subject analyses were conducted, those in steady romantic relationships did not differ in their identity and intimacy goals, whereas those without steady romantic partners clearly reported that identity was a more prominent dating goal than intimacy. Hence, as might be anticipated, individuals with more intimacy goals seem to be more likely to be involved in steady relationships. Yet, we also need to highlight that forming a steady partnership could promote more intimacy dating goals. Again, this finding opens up many possibilities for future research on the patterns of romantic relationship formation and how romantic relationships may assist in constructing individuals' life tasks, as well as impacting upon their social and personal developmental trajectories.

Although about 30% of the participants were not university students, it is still important to keep in mind that this underrepresents the proportion of young people outside higher education in Australia and in many other Western countries. Therefore, these findings may not adequately generalize to young people outside of the education system. University students may be more focused on work and career and more inclined to delay forming committed adult partnerships and commencing parenting until their mid-20's to early 30's when compared to their peers not attending university (Larson et al. 2002). These findings may also not generalize to non-Western countries, as some of the findings, particularly those for identity social dating goals, may be a reflection of the individualism that is argued to be deeply rooted in the culture of most modern western societies (Oyserman et al. 2002).

Concrete definitions of identity have posed conceptual challenges for researchers due to characterization difficulties that have obstructed consensus on exactly what constitutes human identity (Côté 1996), and the shared variation often found between identity and other psychosocial concepts, such as autonomy (Zimmer-Gembeck and Collins 2003). The current attempt to construct a valid and reliable subscale to assess identity dating goals may exhibit similar challenges in precisely defining identity, and it could be argued that our subscale of identity goals taps autonomy and competence goals, as well. We expect that future research will reveal that identity and autonomy dating goals exist and should be considered separately. We also anticipate that there may be other goals relevant as

people form longer term relationships. In particular, a goal of commitment and stability may be relevant as young people settle down with stable partners, have children and cement their job and career identities.

Similarly, the term *intimacy* has also not been without its definitional issues, with over 20 largely different definitions used in the field of close relationships (Fischer et al. 1996). Definitional ambiguity not only impedes theory construction but may also confound research findings. Therefore, at the most basic level, there is more work to do to be explicit about what is meant by identity and intimacy but the measure developed here relied on previous research in these areas as well as previous writing and theory on goals and motivation to make decisions about how to assess each of these as social dating goals.

Finally, the current study was founded on the premise that all late adolescents and emerging adults are active in the development of their own romantic relationships and have dating goals, which is an assumption that is yet to be supported by research. In support of this assumption, however, the need for connectedness or belongingness and the need for autonomy are often described as basic human needs (Baumeister and Leary 1995; Deci and Ryan 2000; Dowrick 2002; Zimmer-Gembeck et al. 2011). Therefore, it seems justifiable that all late adolescents and young adults would have been able to report about their goals in the dating context.

In conclusion, the aim of this study was to take the first steps toward creating a reliable and valid instrument that successfully distinguishes between intimacy, identity and status social dating goals. Such a measure will provide an opportunity for investigation of these dimensions of dating goals in isolation and combination, and forward the study of how dating goals may have implications for social development and relationship functioning, and for adolescent psychosocial development, psychological adjustment and well-being. The SDGS-R could also be a valuable tool for advancing much needed research into the influence of close relationships on the processes of identity and goal development (Kerpelman and Pitman 2001), and to help "examine the diversity of romantic experience, and integrate the field with work on sexuality and adult romantic relationships" (Furman 2002; p. 177).

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