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Peers in careers

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Chapter 2

Work Values at the Transition from School to Work: Do Peers Matter?[2]

2.1. Introduction

The transition from school to working life and the formation of a vocational identity is among the most important developmental tasks in young adulthood with substantial implications for young people's future socio-economic status and psychological well-being (Erikson, 1959; Hirschi, 2010). For this reason, it is an important endeavor in career counseling and vocational psychology to understand how young people make their career decisions. The investigation of work values at the transition to work is a way to conceptualize the personal importance or desirability that individuals ascribe to different aspects of their future careers (e.g., Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007; Kalleberg & Marsden, 2013). Work values form an essential guideline in career-decisions and occupational choices (Brown, 2002; Dobson, Gardner, Metz, & Gore, 2014; Johnson, 2001; Judge & Bretz, 1992), and previous research has demonstrated that occupational ambitions in young adulthood are predictive of later occupational achievements, income, and prestige (Ashby & Schoon, 2010; Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012). Work values have been shown to be influenced by individuals' race, gender, social origins and their experiences in adolescence (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007; Johnson, 2002; Novakovic & Fouad, 2012). However, despite recent research that has pointed towards the role of peers in shaping young people's career decisions and behaviors (Dietrich, Parker, & Salmela-Aro, 2012; Kiuru, Salmela-Aro, Nurmi, Zettergen, Andersson, & Bergman, 2012, Tynkkynen, Nurmi, & Salmela-Aro, 2010), substantially less is known about the role of individuals' immediate social context and especially about their relationships with peers in shaping their work values at the transition from school to work.

In this study, we propose that peer relationships can function as interpersonal antecedents of work values on the verge of the transition from school to work. Taking into account the distinct and combined effects of personal factors of peer relationships (i.e., individuals' interpersonal goals in their relationships with peers) and the peer group as a contextual factor (i.e., individuals' social standing in the peer group), we investigate the link between peer relationships and individuals' relative preference for social and status work values in a sample of Dutch young adults in the transition to working life.

2.2. Interpersonal Correlates of Work Values

Work values describe individuals' evaluative beliefs about the desirability of certain aspects of work and refer to the value attached to different types of rewards that can be

obtained through work (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007; Kalleberg & Marsden, 2013). As such, they form a guideline in young people's career decisions during the transition to work and can provide researchers with insights into the rationale behind young people's occupational choices. Though different typologies exist, a common approach to define work values is the distinction between extrinsic values, which refer to rewards that are attained through work but are external to the experience of work itself, and intrinsic values, which refer to rewards that are inherent in the work itself (Chow, Krahn, & Galambos, 2014; Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007; Johnson, 2001; Lindenberg, 2001; Marini, Fan, Finley, & Beutel, 1996). More differentiated classification systems recognize *social work values* as a distinctive type of intrinsic values that pertain to the acquisition of relational rewards of work such as the opportunity to work with people or to make friends at work. This needs to be differentiated from *status work values*, or people's desire to acquire extrinsic rewards of work such as status and prestige (Johnson, 2002; Marini et al., 1996).

People's desire to attain social and status rewards in interpersonal contexts is not bound to working life. Research on peer relationships in adolescence has for instance identified the need for status and affection as two major motivations in social relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Lindenberg, 2001; Wojciszke et al., 2009). These motivations are likewise reflected in the distinction between communal and agentic goal orientations in social contexts (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007; Trapnell & Paulhus, 2012) as well as the distinction between affective (acceptance) and reputational (popularity) measures of status or social standing in the peer group (e.g., Dijkstra et al., 2009; Parkhurst & Hopmeyer, 1998), which will be discussed in greater depth in the following sections. To acknowledge this difference between young people's need for status and their need for affection as two pervasive motives in different social contexts, we specifically focus on *social work values* or intrinsic values that pertain to the interpersonal rewards of work, and *status work values* or extrinsic values that pertain to the instrumental rewards of work such as status, prestige and monetary incentives. Social and status work values are not assumed to be mutually exclusive but rather a reflection of individuals' relative preference for social or status-related rewards of work.

2.3. Peers in Career Development

Theories of career development have increasingly emphasized that alongside personal and macro-economic factors, career pathways are also shaped by individuals' immediate social

environment. Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) states that the content and processes of career development (i.e., the choices for certain occupations and the routes that lead to the realization of these choices) are embedded in social contexts (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994; Lent, Hackett, & Brown, 1999). This implies that individuals' conceptions of what careers are desirable and attainable for them are formed by their interactions and relationships with significant others.

In late adolescence and young adulthood, the peer group represents an important developmental and socialization context in young people's lives which offers guidance, support, and advice (e.g., Rubin, Bukowski & Parker, 2006). Comparable to SCCT, the recent concept of phase-adequate engagement connects young people's social relationships with significant others such as their peers with their career-related decisions and behaviors. It explicitly acknowledges that during the transition from school to work, young people's career-related decisions and goals are developed jointly in one's immediate social context and in social interactions with their peers (Dietrich et al., 2012). Research on school transitions has further shown that friends and peers serve as important sources of social support during educational or career decisions (Tynkkynen et al., 2010) and that young people who perceive their peers to be more supportive experience this transition to be less difficult (Waters, Lester, & Cross, 2014). Together, these studies point out that peers take on an important role in shaping educational and career-related decisions and behaviors and suggest that social relationships with peers in the school context might also forecast the value that they attach to different aspects of work as they face the transition from school to work. We therefore propose that experiences in the peer group play a considerable role in shaping young people's work values at the transition from school to work. Especially when young adults are facing the transition to a context in which they have little or no prior experience, they are likely to draw on their experiences in previous social contexts to determine the relative desirability and attainability of rewards in future social contexts. To test this proposition, we investigate the extent to which individuals' interpersonal goals in their relationships with peers and their social standing in the peer context relate to their work values on the verge of the transition from school to work.

2.4. Interpersonal Goals in Peer Relationships

Research on the role of goals during life-course transitions has emphasized the importance of goals in motivating actions and selecting developmental contexts (Nurmi, Salmela-Aro, & Koivisto, 2002). A common distinction is that between agentic and communal goals as two overlapping but conceptually different interpersonal goals in relationships with others. The distinction between agency and communion as two general dimensions of human goals can be applied to a variety of social contexts, including work and careers (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007; Trapnell & Paulhus, 2012). For instance, Abele (2003) showed that agency but not communion predicted objective and subjective career success. Generally speaking, individuals with a primarily agentic goal orientation are focused on the acquisition of power and dominance over others but also independence from others. Individuals with a primarily communal goal orientation are focused on social affiliation and the fulfillment of social needs (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007; Trapnell & Paulhus, 2012; Wojciszke, Abele, & Baryla, 2009).

Throughout adolescence, the peer group is one of the primary social contexts in which interpersonal goals are pursued (Dijkstra, Kretschmer, Lindenberg, & Veenstra, 2014). We propose that the strength of individuals' agentic or communal goal orientations in their relationships with peers serves as an indicator for the relative value that they attach to different kinds of rewards in their future work contexts. We specifically propose that (H1) communal goals in the peer group predict social work values and (H2) agentic goals predict status work values.

2.5. Social Standing in the Peer Group

Interpersonal goals are personal characteristics and although they may be affected by an individual's environment, they remain inherent to the individual. However, according to SCCT, career decisions are not only determined by personal characteristics but are subject to individuals' greater social environment and their interactions and relationships with others. Throughout adolescence, individuals' social standing in the peer group is a prominent characteristic of the peer culture and a strong predictor of emotional and behavioral adjustment (Dijkstra, Cillessen, Lindenberg, & Veenstra, 2009; Mayeux, Houser, & Dyches, 2011; Parker & Asher, 1987; Parkhurst & Hopmeyer, 1998). A common distinction in research on adolescent peer relationships is the difference between affective measures of social relatedness and reputational measures of status in the peer

group as two distinct but to some extent overlapping dimensions of individuals' standing in the peer group (e.g., Dijkstra et al., 2009; Parkhurst & Hopmeyer, 1998).

The need to form and maintain strong, stable and positive interpersonal relationships is believed to be a fundamental and powerful human motivation (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Previous research has shown that being accepted by one's peers provides adolescents with this sense of belongingness in the peer group (e.g., Parker and Asher 1993). *Peer acceptance* as an affective measure of social relatedness and fulfillment of one's need to belong in the peer group has been linked to adaptive outcomes in social and academic domains, with accepted and well-liked peers being regarded as friendly and prosocial by their peers (e.g., Parkhurst & Hopmeyer, 1998), and showing better academic achievements (e.g., Lubbers, Van der Werf, Snijders, Creemers, & Kuyper, 2006). Other than peer acceptance, *peer popularity* is a reputational measure of status, salience and influence in the peer group (Mayeux et al., 2011; Parkhurst & Hopmeyer, 1998) which is often achieved by the strategic engagement in prosocial but also aggressive, manipulative, and disruptive behaviors (Dijkstra et al., 2009; Mayeux et al., 2011). Although peer popularity bears the potential risk for negative long-term consequences due to its association with disruptive behavior (e.g., Rodkin, Farmer, Pearl, & Van Acker, 2000), its immediate correlates also include positive characteristics such as greater levels of self-esteem (de Bruyn & van den Boom, 2005).

We propose that individuals' social standing in the peer group and the associated relationship experiences affect their perceptions of the relative desirability and attainability of certain rewards in future social contexts. Well-accepted members of the peer group will regard the formation of positive social relationships in the workplace as a more desirable and attainable reward of work than their less-well accepted peers. Likewise, popular members of the peer group with a social history of high status and influence in the peer group will regard rewards related to status attainment, prestige, and monetary rewards in the work context as more desirable and more attainable as compared to their less popular peers. In detail, we propose that (H3) well-accepted members of the peer group show relatively greater social work values as compared to their less well accepted peers and that (H4) popular members of the peer group show relatively greater status work values as compared to their less popular peers.

2.6. Goal Fulfillment in the Peer Context

Although interpersonal goals are inherent to the individual, they are not independent from the context in which these goals are pursued. Recent research suggested that an agentic goal orientation among adolescents is related to peer popularity, and that a communal goal orientation is related to affective measures of social relatedness in the peer group (Caravita & Cillessen, 2012). Experimental research has further shown that the salience of agentic goals varies with the induction of success or failure, whereas communal goals vary by individuals' previous social (e.g., friendship) experiences (Abele, Rupprecht, & Wojciszke, 2008). To account for the possibility that the presumed link between individuals' interpersonal goals and their work values varies with the previous realization of these goals in the peer context (i.e., individuals' social standing in the peer group), we will explore the interaction between individuals' interpersonal goals and their social standing in the peer group in the prediction of their social and status work values.

2.7. The present Study

The present study employs a sample of Dutch young adults on the threshold of the transition from school-based vocational education to working life to test the hypotheses that individual differences in social and status work values are predicted by respondents' interpersonal goals in peer relationships (H1, 2) and their social standing in the peer group (H3, 4). Moreover, the possibility of an interaction effect between respondents' goals and their social standing in the peer group will be addressed. Respondents' future plans, their socio- economic background, and their gender will be controlled for in all analyses. To account for previous research showing that both interpersonal goals and work values vary by gender (Abele, 2003; Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007; Johnson, 2001; Marini et al., 1996), the interactions between gender and interpersonal goals will be explored.

2.8. Method
2.8.1. Data and Procedure

The data used in the present research stem from a study conducted in the Netherlands aimed at monitoring the transition from vocational education to working life or further education. Data collection has taken place during respondents' final year in education in in the first quarter of the school term of 2011/2012 (T1) and approximately six months later shortly before the end of the school term (T2). Questionnaires have been administered

during regular class hours and consisted of a self-report questionnaire and a sociometric survey assessing peer nominations in the classroom. Measurements have been performed in line with the ethical guidelines for such surveys in the Netherlands. All names and other identifying information have been substituted by code numbers in the resulting dataset including the names that have been provided in the sociometric survey. Neither respondents nor schools have been given access to any of the raw data retrieved through the self-report or sociometric survey or the coding of respondents' names. Prior to administrating the questionnaires, respondents were informed of the procedure of the study and were assured of the confidentiality of their answers. Participants were free to refrain from participation at any moment of the study. Because all respondents were age 16 or above no parental consent was necessary for the surveys that were administered. No monetary incentives or course credits have been offered for participation.

2.8.2. Educational Context

In the Netherlands, vocational training is provided as a school-based form of education (Dutch MBO-BOL) that is obtainable for a variety of professions and at different skill levels. Students commonly enroll in this education at the age of 16 and follow training for two to four years during which they attend regular classes as well as practical training classes in which they acquire vocation-specific knowledge and skills under the supervision of a teacher. Students further gain practical experience in the course of several internships lasting from several weeks to several months throughout the course of their education. Following school-based vocational education is a common educational pathway in the Netherlands. In the years 2011-2013 in with the present study was conducted, approximately 500.000 Dutch students have been enrolled in this type of education. This represents roughly 13.5% of all Dutch students, including all levels from primary education to university.

As of 2010, students at vocational schools do not receive grades anymore. Instead, their performance is assessed based on their competences. The profile of competences that a student needs to attain in a specific vocational education and in a specific educational track is a combination vocation-specific professional skills and knowledge as well as aspects of a good professional attitude such as good communication skills and teamwork that is jointly developed by educational experts and practitioners. Upon completion of their training, students can either enter the labor market directly within their profession or

enroll in additional or follow-up vocational education at the same or a higher level of education. Students who complete their vocational education at the highest obtainable level are eligible to enroll at a University of Applied Sciences.

2.8.3. Sample Description

The study sample consists $N = 216$ respondents (M_{age} T1 = 19.83, $SD = 3.09$, M_{age} T2 = 20.35, $SD = 3.09$, 48.4% female) and includes all respondents who have provided information on their work values at T2 and for whom information on their interpersonal goals and valid peer nominations were available at T1. The majority of the respondents indicated to have a Dutch ethnic background when asked for their country of origin (94%). The remaining respondents indicated that they had been born on the Dutch Antilles (1.4%), Turkey (0.9%), Suriname (0.5%), or elsewhere (3.2%). Respondents who indicated to have been born in a country other than the Netherlands had on average spent 13.52 years in the Netherlands at the time of measurement ($SD = 6.06$, range: 1.3 – 24.0 years). Respondents in the study sample did not significantly differ from the overall sample at T1 (T1, $N = 472$, $M_{age} = 19.87$, $SD = 2.31$, 52.4% female) in their interpersonal goals or peer popularity but had slightly lower ratings of peer acceptance ($M = .31$, $SD = .23$ for respondents in the subsample, $M = .37$, $SD = .26$ for respondents not in the study sample; $t(412) = 2.32$, $p <. 05$). Respondents in the study sample did not significantly differ from the overall sample at T2 ($N = 430$, $M_{age} = 20.08$, $SD = 2.19$, 56.6% female) in their social or status work values but were more likely to be male ($t(418) = -3.70$, $p <. 01$; 1 = male) and marginally less likely to have work-related future plans ($t(421) = 1.83$, $p <. 10$; 0 = non-work, 1 = work).

2.8.4. Measures

2.8.4.1. Work Values

Work values were assessed by asking respondents how important certain job attributes were to them in their future jobs. Based on research by Marini et al. (1996), social work values were assessed by two items tapping into the extent to which respondents attach value to intrinsic rewards that pertain to the social aspects of work ('Having friends at work', 'Getting along well with colleagues'). Status work values were assessed by four items tapping into the extent to which respondents attach value to extrinsic work rewards that pertain to the acquisition of power, prestige, and income ('Having a leadership

position', 'Making a lot of money', 'Having a job that people look up to', 'Determining what is happening in my team'). Answers were recorded on a 5-point scale from 1 = *very unimportant* to 5 = *very important*. Analyses of internal consistency showed a Cronbach's alpha of .80 for status work values. The two items measuring social work values were correlated at $r(217) = .31, p <. 01$). Mean scores were calculated for social and status work values.

2.8.4.2. Interpersonal Goals

Interpersonal goals were assessed with the Interpersonal Goals Inventory (IGI-C; Ojanen, Grönroos, & Salmivalli, 2005). To avoid conceptual overlap with work values, the questions assessing interpersonal goals were explicitly formulated to tap into interpersonal goals in relationships with peers. Respondents were asked to indicate on three items measuring agentic goals and four items measuring communal goals how important it was to them that when among their peers they were, for example, "respected by others" (agentic) or "connected to others" (communal). Answers were recorded on a 5-point scale from 1 = *very unimportant* to 5 = *very important*. Analyses of internal consistency showed a Cronbach's alpha of .50 for agentic goals and .71 for communal goals. Mean scores have been calculated for agentic and communal goals.

2.8.4.3. Social Standing in the Peer Group

Peer acceptance and popularity have been assessed using peer nominations within classrooms at T1. Classroom sizes ranged from 6 to 34 students ($M = 21.04, SD = 7.85$) with an average response rate of 81.1% in the study sample. Respondents were asked to nominate an unlimited number of classmates whom they perceived to be popular ("Who is popular?"; peer popularity) and whom they liked ("Who do you like?"; peer acceptance). Respondents could not nominate themselves. The number of nominations a class member *received* on each question was divided by the number of participating classmates (i.e., the maximum number of possible nominations), yielding proportion scores ranging from 0 to 1. A score of 0 indicates that a respondent received no nominations on this question; a score of 1 indicates that a respondent received nominations from every participating class member on this question. Peer acceptance was indicated by respondents' proportion score of being well-liked by their classmates. Peer popularity was indicated by respondents' proportion score of being perceived as popular by their classmates.

2.8.4.4. Socio-Economic Background

To assess respondents' socio-economic background, their family affluence has been assessed using the Family Affluence Scale (FAS; Boyce, Torsheim, Currie, & Zambon, 2006; Currie, Molcho, Boyce, Holstein, Torsheim, & Richter, 2008). The FAS has been developed as a tool for the assessment of socio-economic status in adolescence to overcome complications arising through adolescents' difficulties in accurately reporting their parents' educational levels, occupations, or incomes. The FAS asks respondents to report on their family's wealth at the hand of a number of consumption indices they are likely to know. Respondents replied to three questions asking them to indicate whether their family owns a car (1= *yes*, 0= *no*), whether they have their own room at their family's home or did have their own room when they were still living at home (1 = *yes*, 0 = *no*), and how many computers their family has at home (0 = *none*, 1 = *1 computer*, 2 = *2 computers*, 3 = *3 computers*). A fourth question asking respondents how often they have been on holiday with their family in the past 12 months has been omitted in the present study as it was not considered appropriate for the current age group. A point system ranging from 0 to 5 has been applied to the three questions assigning one point for each additional asset (i.e., a score of zero if the family had no car, no computers and the respondent did not have an own room at home; a score of 5 if the family had a car, three computers and the respondent did have an own room at home). Scores have been used as a continuous measure of family affluence.

2.8.4.5. Future Plans

Respondents' future plans at T2 have been controlled for to distinguish between respondents who expressed the intention to enter the labor market directly (28.2%, coded as 1 = *work*; irrespective of whether they intended to find part-time or full-time employment or wanted to combine their work with any sort of additional training) and respondents who indicated that they did not want to enter the labor market directly after graduation (71.8%, coded as 0 = *non-work*, irrespective of whether they wanted to complement their training with an additional or follow-up education, were having different plans such as a gap year, or were yet undecided). For respondents who did not provide information on future plans at T2, information on T1 has been included instead.

2.9. Results

2.9.1. Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics and correlations between the main study variables are displayed in Table 2.1. Results show that social and status work values are moderately correlated, consistent with our notion that social and status work values are not mutually exclusive but represent relative preferences of certain types of rewards. The same notion holds for the positive correlation between individuals' interpersonal goals, which represent relative tendencies of one goal-orientation over the other. Peer acceptance and peer popularity are positively correlated. Social and status work values are correlated with both communal and agentic interpersonal goals in the peer group, though correlations are higher for the expected associations between social values and communal goals and between status values and agentic goals. Status work values are not correlated with peer popularity. Social work values are marginally positively correlated with peer acceptance.

Table 2.1.

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations of the main Study Variables (N = 216)

	Mean (SD)	Range	1	2	3	4	5	6	7.	8.
1. Social Work Values	3.98 (.62)	2.00-5.00	1							
2. Status Work Values	3.23 (.66)	1.33-5.00	.21**							
3. Liked	0.31 (.23)	0.00-0.80	.12†	.01						
4. Popular	0.11 (.16)	0.00-0.75	.02	.04	.62**					
5. Communal Goals	3.83 (.60)	1.00-5.00	.31**	.15*	-.02	-.05				
6. Agentic Goals	3.42 (.58)	1.00-5.00	.22**	.29**	-.08	-.12†	.54**			
7. Gender (1=male)	0.52 (.50)	0.00-1.00	-.01	.19**	-.10	.06	-.11	-.04		
8. Future Plans (1=work)	0.28 (.45)	0.00-1.00	.03	.04	.17*	-.12†	.08	.05	.03	
9. Socio-Economic Background	2.68 (.67)	1.00-4.00	.05	.13†	.07	.08	.01	-.03	.15*	-.01

Note. *p < .05. ** p < .01. † p < .10. Socio-Economic Background N = 214.

2.9.2. Strategy of Analysis

Multivariate multilevel regression analysis was conducted (Rasbash, Steele, Browne, & Goldstein, 2012; Snijders & Bosker, 2012) to account for the nested structure of the data with individuals nested in classrooms. To account for the correlation between social and status work values, a multivariate approach was chosen to allow for the simultaneous analysis of both outcome variables. Analyses have been conducted using MLwiN 2.23 (Rasbash, Charlton, Browne, Healy, & Cameron, 2009). The analyses allow us to separate the variance in the two outcome variables, social- and status work values, into variance at the individual level and variance at the group (classroom) level.

Separate models were conducted to examine the variance in social and status work values in a model containing the control variables only (Model 0), in a model containing the control variables and interpersonal goals (Model 1), in a model containing the control variables, peer acceptance and peer popularity (Model 2), in a combined model containing control variables, interpersonal goals, peer acceptance, and peer popularity (Model 3), and in a model containing all main effects together with the interactions between respondents' interpersonal goals and their standing in the peer group (Model 4).

2.9.3. Individual- and Group Level Effects

An initial examination of the empty model provides us with insights into the degree of resemblance between respondents belonging to the same group (classroom), expressed by the intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC), and allows us to draw conclusions on whether the conduction of a multilevel approach is justified. Whereas no significant variance in social work values can be observed at the group-level, the examination of the empty model shows a marginally significant between-group variance in status work values ($b = 0.05$, $SE = 0.03$, $p <. 10$). Further examination of between-group variances in the remaining models shows no significant effects. The variance within groups, at the individual level, was significant for both social- and status work values in all models.

Results suggest that although the observed differences in work values appear to primarily result from individual differences rather than differences between the groups of which these individuals make part, group-level effects on the observed differences in status work values cannot be entirely ruled out. We therefore proceed to conduct a

multilevel analysis to take these group-level effects into account.[3]

2.9.4. Social- and Status Work Values

Initial examination of the control variables with no further predictors in the model (Model 0) showed no significant effects of respondents' gender, future plans, or socio-economic background. Model 1 examines the effect of respondents' interpersonal goals on their social- and status work values, uncontrolled for respondents' peer acceptance and peer popularity. Results show that communal interpersonal goals in relationships with peers predict social work values ($b = 0.27$, $SE = 0.08$, $p < .01$; consistent with Hypothesis 1), and that agentic interpersonal goals in relationships with peers predict status work values ($b = 0.31$, $SE = 0.08$, $p < .01$; consistent Hypothesis 2). Model 2 examines the effects of respondents' peer acceptance and peer popularity on their social- and status work values, uncontrolled for their interpersonal goals in the peer group. Results show that peer acceptance predicts social work values ($b = 0.49$, $SE = 0.25$, $p < .05$; consistent with Hypothesis 3) but that peer popularity does not predict status work values (rejecting Hypothesis 4). Model 3 is displayed in Table 2.2 and shows that these effects remain unchanged if respondents' interpersonal goals in the peer group, their peer acceptance, and their peer popularity are examined together in a combined model.

2.9.5. Interaction Effects

None of the interaction effects between interpersonal goals and respondents' social standing in the peer group researched significance (Model 4). The additional examination of the interaction between respondents' gender and their agentic and communal interpersonal goals showed no significant results. Interaction effects have not been included in Table 2.2.

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[3] Discarding the multilevel structure did not change the results concerning the hypotheses under study.

Table 2.2.

Multivariate Multilevel Regression Analysis predicting Social and Status Work Values (N = 216)

	Social Work Values		Status Work Values	
	Estimate	*SE*	**Estimate**	*SE*
Intercept	2.28**	0.34	1.65**	0.35
Control Variables				
Gender (1=male)	0.06	0.09	0.16	0.10
Future Plans (1=work)	0.03	0.09	0.08	0.09
Socio-Economic Background	0.05	0.06	0.10	0.06
Interpersonal Goals				
Communal Goals	0.26**	0.08	0.01	0.08
Agentic Goals	0.12	0.08	0.32**	0.09
Standing in the Peer Group				
Peer Acceptance	0.49*	0.24	0.13	0.26
Peer Popularity	-0.19	0.35	0.21	0.38
Between Groups				
Variance	0.01	0.02	0.03	0.02
Covariance	-0.01	0.01		
Within groups				
Variance	0.33**	0.03	0.34**	0.04
Covariance	0.06*	0.02		
Deviance (df = 8)	759.05**			

Note. *$p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. Change in deviance compared to model containing control variables only (deviance = 808.07)

2.10. Discussion

This study set out to examine the role of the peer group as a developmental context in which work values are shaped. We proposed that individuals' interpersonal goals in relationships with peers and their social standing in the peer group serve as interpersonal antecedents of individual differences in social and status work values at the transition from school to work. Our results are consistent with the expectation that the interpersonal goals that young people pursue in the peer context are associated with individual differences in social and status work values. Respondents who pursued primarily agentic goals in their relationships with peers showed higher status work values but not higher social work values. Respondents who pursued primarily communal goals in their relationships with peers showed higher social work values but not higher

status work values. Our results show that interpersonal goals in relationships with peers serve as an indicator for the relative value that individuals attach to different kinds of rewards that can be obtained through their future jobs and, through this route, may affect their future career decisions.

The results further show that the peer context affects individuals' social work values over and above their personal goals. Individuals who were well-accepted by their peers reported higher social work values but not higher status work values. This finding underlines the proposition that belongingness in the peer group matters beyond the immediate peer context through its association with preferences for future social contexts. Occupying a popular position in the peer group was not associated with either social or status work values. Our results lend no support for the notion that popular members of the peer group perceive status-related rewards of work as more desirable as compared to their less popular peers. The lack of an effect for peer popularity may be grounded in the age group and developmental period in which our study has been conducted. The vast majority of studies on peer popularity focus on children and adolescents (Dijkstra et al., 2009; Mayeux et al., 2011; Parker & Asher, 1987; Parkhurst & Hopmeyer, 1998). So far, few empirical studies have addressed the relevance of a popular position in the peer context in older age groups. Future studies may direct greater attention to the immediate and long-term associations of peer popularity in young adulthood.

2.10.1. Strengths and Limitations

Our results shed light on the role of peers in young adult's work values at the transition from school to work and contribute to a rising stream of literature acknowledging the importance of peer relationships in career decisions and early career development (Dietrich et al., 2012; Nurmi et al., 2002). The present study applied a multi-source approach consisting of self-reported goals and sociometric data of respondents' standing in the peer group. This approach enabled us to extend the focus of the study to the wider peer group and allowed us to examine the distinctive effects of factors on the individual level (i.e., interpersonal goals) and on the contextual level (i.e., standing in the peer group) separately and combined. By drawing on sociometric data to assess individuals' standing in the peer group we overcome the potential bias that would have resulted from a self-reported measure of respondents' peer relationships.

There are, however, some limitations to this study. First, for the assessment of interpersonal goals we used the IGI-C (Ojanen et al., 2005) which was initially developed for younger participants. Because the questions were specifically designed to measure interpersonal goals in the peer context we chose this version. However, the subscale measuring agentic goals showed relatively low internal consistency. It is possible that the questions tapping into communal goals work well in younger and older samples alike whereas questions tapping into agentic goals change with age and are less suitable to young adults than they are to adolescents. Because the three items measuring agentic interpersonal goals covered different aspects of agentic goals which were all deemed relevant content-wise (being respected by others; making a confident impression on others; being regarded as smart by others) and deletion of an item might have compromised the validity of the subscale, no alterations to the scale were made.

Second, due to the correlational nature of the data that are used, no causality can be implied and we cannot entirely rule out that one underlying factor affects both young people's relationships in the school context and their work values at the transition to work. It is possible that a general underlying orientation towards either social or status rewards of one's social relationships causes them to pursue either communal or agentic goals in their peer relationships, drives them towards the pursuit of either acceptance or popularity in the peer group and later one affects their work values when making decision on their future work contexts.

Finally, our study addresses young adult's initial work values at the verge of the transition to work. Our findings therefore pertain to the transition period and cannot be generalized to the development of work values throughout young adult's early career. The focus of the present study lies on the role of peer relationships *during* the transition but does not capture the extent to which these initial work values are prone to change *after* the transition to work once individuals gather experience in the labor market.

2.10.2. Implications and Future Directions

Though theories on career development emphasize the importance of social relationship with significant others in career development, up to now, research has strongly focused on the role of parents and insights on the role of peers in career decisions and early career development are yet relatively limited. Understanding how young people's interpersonal goals and their social standing in the peer group affect their subsequent

work values increases our understanding of the dynamics that take place in late adolescent and young adult peer groups. The findings of the present study emphasize the importance of peer relationships in understanding young people's work values and demonstrate that the peer context deserves closer attention in future studies on career decisions at the transition from school to work. Our results lend further support to the notion forwarded by Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent et al., 1994; Lent et al., 1999) that social relationships and contextual factors matter in occupational preferences and career decisions, and shows that this notion also holds for relationships with peers. Future research may extend the scope of this study to assess how individual and contextual factors of the peer group affect the development of work values and career-related behaviors beyond the immediate transition period.