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The advantages of task-based and other-based achievement goals as standards of competence

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated aspects of validity in a Norwegian version of the 3 × 2 achievement goal framework, which is a recent development of the achievement goal construct based on task- self- and other-based standards of competence. Confirmatory factor analysis supported the expected 3 × 2 factor structure of this model. Correlational and multivariate analyses showed that these factors were differentially related to aspects of motivation and learning strategies in terms of achievement motives (motive for success and motive to avoid failure), self-efficacy, value, learning strategies (deep, surface and strategic), and academic achievement. In general, task-based and other-based approach goals were related to more functional aspects of the abovementioned motivational variables. Conversely, self-based goals (both approach and avoidance) showed an opposite pattern of relations to these variables. In conclusion, contrasting a current state with a possible outcome is effective when using task- and other-based standards of evaluation, but not when using self-based standards.

1. Introduction

Achievement goals may be defined as the purpose for engaging in achievement behavior (Maehr, 1989), or as cognitive representations of future states that an individual is committed to approach or avoid (Elliot & Fryer, 2008). The achievement goal construct traditionally describes valence of goals in terms of approach and avoidance, and definition of goals, in terms of mastery and performance, within a trichotomous or a 2 × 2 framework (Elliot, 1999).

A more recent development of achievement goal theory has proposed a 3 × 2 framework, in which the valence (approach–avoidance) has been retained, whereas the definition of goals has been extended to include three distinct standards of competence in terms of task, self, and other-based standards (Elliot, Murayama, & Pekrun, 2011). The original study of these 3 × 2 achievement goals (Elliot et al., 2011) found support for several aspects of validity, including construct validity, prediction of academic achievement, and correlations with other motivational constructs. However, beyond three subsequent studies in which additional support for this model was found (Brondino, Raccanello, & Pasini, 2014; Johnson & Kestler, 2013; Mascret, Elliot, & Cury, 2015), there appears to be no additional research on this particular model of achievement goals, and it has been suggested that further research is needed to investigate the generizability of the findings (Elliot et al., 2011).

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Hence, the purpose of the present study is to further explore the validity of this 3 × 2 model by investigating construct validity (factor structure) and criterion validity in terms of its relation to academic achievement and aspects of student motivation in terms of achievement motives, self-efficacy, and task value within a Norwegian study context. In addition, the relation between these 3 × 2 achievement goals and learning strategies will be explored, as they have proven to be relevant in previous research on the trichotomous and the 2 × 2 achievement goal framework (Diseth & Kobbeltvedt, 2010; Elliot, McGregor, & Gable, 1999).

2. Achievement goals

Elliot et al. (2011) pointed out that the mastery–performance distinction in achievement goal theory has come to be defined in two different ways. Originally, it referred to development of competence in terms of mastery goals versus demonstration of competence in terms of performance goals (Ames & Archer, 1987). However, a more recent version of achievement goal theory (AGT) has emphasized the particular standards used to define competence (Elliot & Thrash, 2001). More specifically, the performance goal comprises an interpersonal standard in terms of performance relative to others, whereas the mastery goal comprises both an objective and an intrapersonal standard. Elliot et al. (2011) remarked that the objective and intrapersonal standard in the mastery goal actually comprises two different standards of evaluation in terms of task-based (objective) and self-based (intrapersonal) competence.

A recently developed 3 × 2 model of achievement goals includes this distinction, by dividing mastery goals into standards of competence based on task and self, and by defining performance goal as standards of competence based on comparison with others. For task-based goals, competence is defined in terms of accomplishments relative to what the task itself requires. The evaluative components of self-based goals are defined in terms of accomplishments relative to past achievement. Finally, other-based goals define competence in terms of performance relative to others (Elliot et al., 2011).

Previous research has linked achievement goals to a number of other motivational constructs, such as motive dispositions, self-efficacy, and learning strategies, and as predictors of academic achievement (Diseth & Kobbeltvedt, 2010; Diseth, 2011; Elliot, 1999; Liem, Lau, & Nie, 2008). These studies have contributed to different aspects of construct validity of the achievement goal construct, as well as investigation of antecedents and consequences of achievement goals. This research on the validity of achievement goal constructs will be reviewed below, both with reference to traditional approaches (2 × 2 and trichotomous models) and to the more recent 3 × 2 model of achievement goals.

3. Achievement goals and achievement motives

In general, the field of achievement motivation encompasses both needs and goals, and it is relevant to consider the relation between them. For example, Deci and Ryan (2000) pointed out that goals inform us *how* we are motivated, whereas needs inform us *why* motivation occurs in the first place. The approach–avoidance valence distinction in achievement goal theory is also present in theories on needs for achievement, which are referred to as achievement motives, and defined as the latent capacity to anticipate affect in situations in which performance is evaluated either by the agent or by an observer (Christophersen & Rand, 1982). These achievement motives are represented by two distinct factors in terms of the motive for success (Ms), which is indicated by positive affect and increased engagement in achievement situations, and the motive to avoid failure (Mf) which is indicated by negative affect and decreased engagement (Atkinson, 1966; McClelland, Atkinson, Clark, & Lowell, 1953).

Whereas achievement goals are contextual and domain specific (Bong, 2001a), achievement needs are considered to be relatively stable motive dispositions, with a foundation in personality (Diseth & Martinsen, 2009). However, these latent motive dispositions may have trajectories to context specific achievement goals. For example, Elliot and Church (1997) found that achievement motivation (comparable to Ms) predicted both mastery and performance-approach goals, and that competence expectancy (comparable to self-efficacy) was positively related to mastery and performance approach, and negatively related to performance avoidance goals. Finally, the motive to avoid failure (Mf) was positively related to both performance-approach and performance-avoidance goals, indicating that an avoidance motive may have both an approach and avoidance goal trajectory. Diseth and Kobbeltvedt (2010) partly replicated this finding by showing that Ms predicted mastery and performance approach goals, while Mf predicted performance avoidance.

These motive dispositions are also related to other measures of affective based temperament (Bjørnebekk, 2009). Within the more recent 3 × 2 framework of achievement goal standards, Elliot et al. (2011) related goals to approach–avoidance temperaments by means of the Elliot and Thrash's (2010) Approach–Avoidance Temperament Questionnaire. They found that approach temperament positively predicted task approach and avoidance, self-approach, and other approach, while avoidance temperament predicted all of the avoidance goals (task, self, other) in addition to positively predict other-approach goal. This shows that avoidance temperament may have both an approach and avoidance achievement goal trajectory, similarly to the abovementioned study by Elliot and Church (1997). Whereas these approach–avoidance temperaments are not identical to the achievement motives in the current study, they are comparable, because they share an emphasis on affect based dispositions for approach–avoidance behavior (Bjørnebekk, 2009).