



Students' achievement goal orientations and their behavioral and emotional engagement: Co-examining the role of perceived school goal structures and parent goals during adolescence

Eleftheria N. Gonida*, Katerina Voulala, Grigoris Kiosseoglou

School of Psychology, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, GR-541 24, Thessaloniki, Greece

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ABSTRACT

The role of perceived school goal structures and parent goals in predicting adolescents' goal orientations and their behavioral and emotional engagement in the classroom was examined in the present study. Surveys were given to a sample of 271 seventh- and ninth-grade students. Path analyses showed that (a) perceived school mastery goal structures and parent mastery goals predicted student mastery goal orientation, perceived school and parent performance goals predicted student performance-avoidance goal orientation, whereas performance-approach orientation was only predicted by perceived parent performance goals; (b) perceived school and parent mastery goals predicted behavioral but not emotional engagement directly as well as indirectly through the mediation of student mastery goal orientation; (c) behavioral and emotional engagement were predicted by student mastery goal orientation. Results are discussed in relation to current theory and their implications for promoting adaptive patterns of learning in the school and the family context.

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1. Introduction

A few years ago Epstein (1989, p. 290) notably commented that "It is imperative to study the family along with the school to understand contextual effects on student motivation and learning". Since then numerous studies have focused on several aspects of school environment and family context in order to illuminate their effects on motivational constructs and/or learning outcomes. However, most of the studies have focused either on school or on parental influences, and little is known about how these two contexts function when they are co-examined.

Within achievement goal theory, which is the theoretical framework of this study, it is important to clarify how contextual factors, such as the school and the family, are related to student goal orientations. Maehr (2001, p. 184) refers to 'some kind of determining environment' since 'goals presumably can be induced' and stresses the potential importance of context in fostering achievement goals, both for theoretical and for applied purposes. According to his concerns, future research has to examine the contexts within which achievement goals are encouraged and how goals become part of a person's life as well as to design intervention programs promoting goal adoption for educational purposes.

The critical role of the classroom structure and the school, in general, in goal adoption and the promotion of adaptive motivational patterns has been suggested by many previous research studies referring to several dimensions of classroom environment, including student perceptions about it, such as goal structures, task characteristics, evaluation practices, lecture engagement, teacher–student relationships, emotional and educational support (Ames, 1992; Ames & Archer, 1988; Church, Elliot, & Gable, 2001; Patrick, Ryan, & Kaplan, 2007; Roeser, Midgley, & Urdan, 1996; Ryan, Gheen, & Midgley, 1998; Turner et al., 2002; Urdan & Midgley, 2003; Urdan, Midgley, & Anderman, 1998). Parental influences, including student perceptions about them, have only recently been examined in regard to student motivation and, particularly, to student achievement goal orientation with perceived parenting styles, parent involvement, and parental support to be the mostly examined parental variables (see, for example, Glasgow, Dornbusch, Troyer, Steinberg, & Ritter, 1997; Gonzalez, Doan Holbein, & Quilter, 2002; Gonzalez-DeHass, Willems, & Doan Holbein, 2005; Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Urdan, Solek, & Schoenfelder, 2007). In the present study, school and parents are co-examined as two important contexts which may facilitate or impair the adoption of student goal orientation; more specifically, students' perceptions of their school goal structures and parent goals are examined as predictors of their personal achievement goal orientations and their engagement in the classroom.

Most researchers agree upon a trichotomous framework of personal achievement goal orientations (Elliot & Church, 1997; Elliot

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +30 2310 997309; fax: +30 2310 997384.
E-mail address: gonida@psy.auth.gr (E.N. Gonida).

& Harackiewicz, 1996; Middleton & Midgley, 1997; Skaalvik, 1997), within which performance goal orientation has been separated into two conceptually distinct components, namely approach and avoidance, and three goal orientations are posited: mastery, performance-approach, and performance-avoidance. A mastery orientation refers to a focus on understanding, skill acquisition, task mastery, and competence development, in general. A performance-approach orientation is focused on demonstrating competence and gaining favorable judgments, whereas a performance-avoidance orientation is focused on avoiding the demonstration of lack of competence and unfavorable judgments. Whereas research has established that mastery goals are consistently associated with adaptive patterns of learning and performance-avoidance goals with maladaptive ones, the evidence about the consequences of performance-approach goals has not been as consistent (see, for a review, Kaplan, Middleton, Urda, & Midgley, 2002). In many cases performance-approach goals have emerged as related to positive outcomes such as academic achievement, self-efficacy and self-concept and unrelated to negative ones such as anxiety in math classes (e.g., Church et al., 2001; Elliot & Church, 1997; Skaalvik, 1997), but in other cases as positive predictors of negative outcomes such as test anxiety (Middleton & Midgley, 1997) and avoidance of help seeking (Ryan, Hicks, & Midgley, 1997). Further, Midgley, Kaplan, and Middleton (2001) argue that factors such as students' age or how competitive the context is may be associated with the potential benefits of performance-approach orientation.

1.1. Achievement goal orientations and engagement in the classroom

Engagement in the classroom as a motivational outcome refers to students' involvement in initiating and executing learning activities and it is expressed by both behavioral and emotional components. In other words, it includes the behaviors manifested by the students and the emotions experienced by them while they are carrying out their school work (Wellborn, 1991). Specifically, behavioral engagement refers to a wide variety of energized as well as enervated behaviors such as initiation, concentrated attention, persistence, effort, avoidance, passivity, giving up, whereas emotional engagement refers to positive and negative emotions such as enjoyment, curiosity, anxiety, anger, or boredom (see also Miserandino, 1996; Skinner & Belmont, 1993). In the present study and as in previous studies (see, for example, Miserandino, 1996), student engagement was theorized as active behavior exhibited by the students in the classroom (e.g., involvement, persistence) and as positive emotion experienced during class work (e.g., curiosity, enjoyment, low anxiety, absence of boredom).

Experimental studies (e.g., Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996) as well as studies based on self-reports (e.g., Elliot & Church, 1997; see also Kaplan, Middleton et al., 2002, for a review) have consistently provided evidence about the beneficial consequences of mastery goal orientation on intrinsic motivation in terms of active behavior such as spending longer time on a task during a free-choice period, preferring challenging tasks, persisting in the face of difficulties, reporting greater effort and less avoidance behaviors. Performance-avoidance goals have been found to undermine intrinsic motivation, to be positively correlated to avoidance behaviors and effort withdrawal, and negatively to graded performance. Performance-approach goals have not been found to undermine intrinsic motivation but they have not been positive predictors of it either, whereas they have been positively correlated with graded performance and with study strategies presumed to facilitate performance.

As far as emotional engagement is concerned, most of the studies have linked mastery goals with positive affect towards specific subjects such as mathematics (Linnenbrink, 2005) or school in general (Kaplan & Maehr, 1999; Roeser et al., 1996). Performance-avoidance goals have been found to be positively related to students' test anxiety (Elliot & McGregor, 1999; Skaalvik, 1997) and negative affect (Sideridis, 2003), whereas null relations have been found between performance-approach goals and positive and negative affect in mathematics

(Sideridis, 2003). In a recent work, Pekrun, Elliot, and Maier (2006) conducted two studies and indicated that, first, mastery goals positively predicted enjoyment about learning, hope and pride and negatively anger and boredom, second, performance-approach goals positively predicted pride, and third, performance-avoidance goals positively predicted anxiety, hopelessness, and shame.

1.2. Perceived school goal structures and parent goals: correlates and consequences

Although, the predictive value of perceived school goal structures has been studied in regard to a number of variables, such as personal achievement goal orientations, psychological and behavioral functioning at school, strategy use, coping strategies, affect, motivational engagement, avoidance strategies, disruptive behavior, academic achievement (see, for example, Anderman, 1999; Kaplan & Midgley, 1999; Kaplan, Gheen, & Midgley, 2002; Roeser et al., 1996; Turner et al., 2002; Urda & Midgley, 2003; Urda et al., 1998; Wolters, 2004), our knowledge about the role of perceived parent goals is still scant, since very few researchers have examined the achievement goal-related messages students perceive from their parents or parent goals themselves and their predictive value on student motivation and attainment (Friedel, Cortina, Turner, & Midgley, 2007; Gonida, Kiosseoglou, & Voulala, 2007; Gutman, 2006).

All the above studies have shown that students tend to perceive two different achievement goal-related messages encouraged either by their schools or by their parents, namely, mastery or learning goals and performance goals. An orientation towards learning or mastery by the school means that emphasis is given to understanding of school work, to skill acquisition, to effort, and to personal improvement, and it has been found that it is highly probable students to adopt mastery goals and, in turn, to exhibit adaptive patterns of learning, such as effective strategy use, selection of challenging tasks, attributions to effort, high perceived academic competence, persistence under adverse conditions, positive attitudes towards schoolwork, as well as help seeking and avoidance of self-handicapping strategies. On the contrary, when the school emphasizes the importance of high grades and external rewards, social comparison and competition among the students, students are more likely to espouse performance goals, either approach or avoidance, and in turn, to show maladaptive patterns of learning, especially when performance-avoidance goals are adopted (Ames, 1992; Anderman & Anderman, 1999; Pintrich & Schunk, 1996). For performance-approach goals, as has been referred earlier, the findings are inconsistent (see, Midgley et al., 2001). Moreover, school goal structures were found to predict students' cognitive, emotional, motivational, and behavioral patterns both directly and indirectly through the mediation of students' personal achievement goal orientations (Kaplan & Maehr, 1999; Roeser et al., 1996; Wolters, 2004).

Similarly, when students perceive that their parents wish and try them to develop and acquire new skills, to focus on understanding and deep learning, and to improve themselves as learners, the adoption of mastery goals and, in turn, high academic self-efficacy beliefs, adaptive coping strategies in the case of negative academic experiences, and behavioral and emotional engagement in the classroom are more likely to occur whereas maladaptive coping strategies are less likely to occur. When students perceive that their parents' emphasis is on school grades and either on demonstration of ability or on avoiding the demonstration of lack of ability in comparison to others, then a performance goal orientation is more likely to be adopted by the students and, in turn, maladaptive coping and non-coping with negative academic experiences are more likely to occur (Friedel et al., 2007; Gonida et al., 2007). More specifically, in the study conducted by Friedel et al. (2007), in which both perceived teacher and parent goals were examined, perceived parent goals were found to be strong predictors of students' goal orientations. Moreover, personal achievement goal orientations

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